Ewald Flügel
Reudnitz 18. Nov. 1886.

THE LITERARY HISTORY
OF ENGLAND



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OF

ENGLAND

IN THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH AND BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

BY MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'MAKERS OF FLORENCE,' ETC.

" Reading maketh a full man."—BACON, *On Study.*
" A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life."—MILTON, *Areopagitica.*
" Je ne voyage sans livres, ny en paix, ny en guerre. C'est la meilleure munition que j'aye trouvé à cet humain voyage."—MONTAIGNE, Livre iii. Chap. iii.
" Books are the legacies that a great genius leaves to mankind."—ADDISON, *Spectator.*

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1882

Printed by R. & R. Clark, *Edinburgh.*

PREFACE.

It is with diffidence that the Author of the following volumes offers them to the public. The subject is a great one, and so manifold in its details that it is impossible not to have made omissions in various quarters: and especially in those on which she can pretend to least knowledge, in the graver literature of Science and Philosophy. It was intended originally that the work should extend farther, and come down to the elder figures even of our own times, the poets who are now regnant in England, and the many eminent writers who have but just departed; but the period before our own, which has formed them and us, and which reaches into our own by so many survivals, was found too rich and ample to allow of further additions. The aim of the Author has been throughout rather to give, as fully as she was able, a history of the new departures, in poetry above all, in criticism, in fiction, and, to the extent of her ability, to indicate those which have occurred in history and philosophy—than to undertake an absolute

commentary upon every individual writer. She is prepared to be told that she has passed too lightly over some important names; and if some lesser ones have escaped her altogether, to receive with humility any strictures which may be pronounced upon her on this account. Her aim has been to set forth the remarkable outburst of new and noble genius by which the end of last century and the beginning of our own was distinguished, and made into a great and individual age in literature. It is hard to cut the line clear across all those intertwinings of human life and influence by which one generation links itself to another; and consequently the story will be found to overlap the boundaries on both sides, now going too far back, now reaching too far forward. The kind and sympathetic reader will see how this comes about, and how the uneven lines of life—some cut so sadly short, some holding on their course up to old age—cannot fail to leave an irregular outline. For all faults of omission or redundancy, she makes her apology beforehand, with the hope of being able to amend them at some future time.

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THE LITERARY HISTORY OF ENGLAND.

INTRODUCTORY.

The literary history of every country follows a course of its own. It is independent to a great measure of the political existence of the race in which it is developed, and except in so far as a period of remarkable intellectual activity in other ways is generally distinguished also by one of the great outbursts of literary genius which recur from time to time, it cannot be said to follow any of the rules of historical progress known to us. Even in this respect there is no fixed rule; for though the glory of the Elizabethan age was a sort of universal flood-tide, swelling the veins of every manner of man, and communicating greatness to every section of the national life, there was no public soul whatever in Germany when the great literature of that country arose at a bound; and few ages have seen more vigour and grace in letters than the period, so little remarkable otherwise, in which Louis Philippe reigned in France.

Neither does Literature develop historically as national life does. In the history of men and of commonwealths there is a slow progression, which, however faint, however deferred, yet gradually goes on, leaving one generation always a trifle better than that which preceded it, with some scrap of new possession, some right assured, some small inheritance gained. From age to age the advance may be small, yet it is appreciable. Great statesmen and little, together work out something for us that we had not possessed before. Even in the countries most behindhand in the race, things which were easy and invariable a hundred years ago have now become impossible. New modifications and conditions arise continually, the public sense is awakened, or it is cultivated, or at all events it is changed. There will of course always be a large and respectable portion of mankind, to whose ideas progress is a mistake, and the old always better than the new; but even this class so far recognises the reality of the new, as to agree that the civilised races cannot retrace their steps, and that the old order, if it remains a thing to sigh for, yet cannot be brought back. "Our little systems have their day;" but that day being over, humanity passes on and cannot return. The reforms from which we have hoped most, the advances for which we have struggled most strenuously, do not produce all the good we expected; but we cannot, nor would we, undo them. In everything there is a current onward, perhaps downward, but never back. In individual life, and all its personal manifestations,

it is true enough that the thing that hath been is that that shall be; but in history there is a gradual working out and working on, a certain logic, and some traceable principle of development. The principle indeed changes from time. It comes to a climax. It is a despotism growing and ripening towards a great catastrophe; it is a hot democracy, dropping asunder into anarchy and confusion; it is a struggle of force against force, of kings and populace, of nobles and adventurers, of those who have and those who would have—each working towards destruction or towards consolidation, by means which are dimly or grandly traceable across the ages, but each leading to something, intended or unintended, which was not before, and which turns the current slowly another way, alters the channel, overflows the boundaries, makes a wilderness of a fruitful field, or turns the sandy desert into shocks of standing corn. All is not absolute good or advantage to the human race; but yet the race is stepping onward, it discovers new powers, it learns new ameliorations, and if it also makes proof of novel sufferings and dangers, it finds new defences and medicines for them. Whether progress makes the general mass of mankind really happier or better, will always be a moot question; but yet it improves their position from one generation to another. It goes on making certain sorts of evil obsolete, as well as certain sorts of good; it overcomes the coarser conditions of life, gives universal protection, better shelter, opportunities before unknown. It is in fact a real progress, even

through a thousand drawbacks, and every age leaves some foundation upon which the next can build.

But in the history of literature no such development can be traced. Since the age of Elizabeth how much has been altered in the national life, what convulsions have been gone through, what constitutional changes achieved! From insurrections and beheadings without number, to a constitutional calm, in which a hot word is the fiercest weapon ever used among Englishmen, and an indignation meeting the wildest attempt of the rebellious; from a set of pirate sea-knights robbing the Spanish galleons, to peaceful navies that fill all the ports of the world; from a half settled plantation amid the western mists, to colonies and conquests that circle the whole earth around, what a difference! And perhaps most wonderful of all, if not so imposing, from the rude and homely life in which few softnesses existed, to a miraculous comfort which pervades all classes, even the poorest, and carries to the humblest house conveniences and ameliorations of living of which great Elizabeth herself had no thought. All this is true; but we have not advanced upon Shakspeare; Bacon is still our fountain-head of philosophy, nay, even old Chaucer remains the "well of English undefiled." All the generations of poets and prose writers who have flourished since, and who have had it in their power to start from the point where these great authorities left off, have failed to improve upon their masters.

This is a problem, we think, harder to solve than

the scientific puzzles which occupy so many minds; but it is one to which no philosopher has ever yet attempted a solution. In art this strange contradiction of all rules is equally patent; and we are tempted to quote an illustrative anecdote, not *ben trovato* only, like the vanities of Mr. Punch's æsthetic victims, but simply true. "Do you think, perhaps," said an amused critic listening to the condescending comments of a young artist upon Fra Angelico, "that you could do as well?" The youth was modest; he took nothing upon himself; but he knew something about the long results of time, the infinite study which has been given to all the conditions of art since Fra Angelico's time. "I think," he said, "that considering all the progress that has been made since then, and the laws of perspective, and the mysteries of light and shade that we have mastered, and all the work of the generations, it would be no credit to one if one could not aspire to do—better." The hope was most reasonable—nothing could be better founded; surely a highly-trained painter of the nineteenth century must be a small creature indeed if he cannot do better than a poor monk of the fourteenth. And surely a young poet of the same period, trained in all the learning of all the ages, with classic examples at his finger-ends, and all the wealth of native literature to form his standing ground, and the full command of an enriched and refined language—surely, by all the laws of progress, and every canon of nature, he ought to do better than a poor player of three hundred

years ago, with few models, no rules of composition, and no particular training at all.

And yet somehow it is not so. The expectation is not in reality presumptuous, though it seems presumptuous to the point of ridicule. Why? But to this question we can give no answer. The processes of Development or Evolution, of which we have heard so much, are manifestly suspended in Physics since the age of history began, so that nowhere, since men have been able to report or perceive their own progress, has an inch been added to their stature, or a joint to their fingers—a result which must be confusing to the scientific student even on his own ground; but the development of mind has not even remained stationary like that of the body. It has been regulated by some spasmodic force which no one has tried to define, and which acts by great unforeseen impulses of irregular recurrence, of which no one has succeeded in calculating the times or seasons. We scarcely venture, in these days of certainty as to the laws which regulate everything, to quote the old divine description of the wind that bloweth where it listeth. In the nineteenth century it is more philosophical to say that the movements of literary genius are determined by some force of which we have not as yet discovered the conditions, some influence of a volcanic order which lies and broods and smoulders in the bowels of the earth, until the moment comes when its flames burst forth and fling themselves to the skies, and the molten metal pours over hill and plain. But when

this eruption may occur, or how it comes about, is unknown to man; neither is it possible to predict—as with its physical parallel it sometimes is possible—by any heavings of the soil or subterraneous moan of force restrained, about what time or in what direction the mysterious impulse may be given.

To leave similes aside, nothing is more remarkable in the history of humanity, or less capable of reduction to rule, than are the waves of literary impulse. They neither resemble each other, nor do they move at regular intervals; nor has one, so far as we can perceive, any natural connection in the way of cause and effect with another, or resemblance to it. No two spirits that have ever inhabited this earth have less mental kindred than has Milton to Shakspeare, though he was the natural heir upon whom the mantle of poetry descended, and who wore the crown after our sovereign poet. And through all the succession of the ages the same fact is apparent: Dryden had it next, then Pope—inferior princes, with no such imperial rank as their predecessors, but equally unlike them; and who could estimate the unsimilarity, the antagonism on every point, between Pope and Wordsworth? The mind and the form and the meaning change from one generation to another so entirely, that in each it seems a new thing, a separate creation, instead of a succession and hereditary kingdom. Now and then, appearing obliquely through the course of the ages, certain indications of kinship will appear, to remind us accidentally of a possible connection too subtle for our tracing. But every singer is a new

miracle—created if nothing else is created—no growth developed out of precedent poets, but something sprung from an impulse which is not reducible to law—a being without father, without mother, like the mysterious patriot-king and priest upon the old Chaldean plains. How this is, is as difficult to find out as how human identity is, the most secret of all wonders. Science, so far as we are aware, has not even attempted to fathom this strangest of all the strange caprices in the universe; but it is very curious, and very well worth the profoundest study.

The history of England from a literary point of view may be broadly divided into three great epochs, which are not so much the three centuries in which modern literature may almost be said to originate and run its course, as they are three eras which may be distinguished as the age of Elizabeth, the age of Anne, and, we should be glad to say for the sake of euphony and delightful equipoise, the age of Victoria; but, alas! though a number of the great names which made the last epoch illustrious lasted into her day, truth compels us to admit that the last flood-tide of intellectual wealth and genius came in the age of George, most unpoetical of patrons. If in this we seem to omit the great autocracy, or rather theocracy, administered by a severe and splendid deputy, of Milton, we do so with no want of veneration, but solely because his period was himself, and the gentle songsters around him, sweet as they were, had no title to the rank of princes, or sharers of his supremacy. But in the others we have named, genius is poured forth in a full

and overflowing stream, and the leading spirit of the time is but the chief among equals. Nor does Dryden, his contemporary and successor, give sufficient wealth to the epoch to make it compete in greatness with the other groups. In the eighteenth century, however, a host of writers arose, following the same fashions and partaking the same influence, with a unity which links them together, as the writers of the Elizabethan age were linked. It will probably always remain a question for discussion what is the comparative importance of this period as coming between the others which have created English literature; but that it was an epoch of the most marked character there can never be any doubt. In its own opinion it was the climax and sublimest development of English genius. The prodigious wealth and freedom of the preceding age were, to its fastidious eyes, license and savagery. It was the age of taste, of critics, of style as an elaborate art, a thing cultivated for its own sake; and as nothing worthy to be regarded had come before it, so it was hard to see what could come after it. Pope brought its poetical utterance to perfection; and beyond perfection even the archangels cannot reach. After him were echoes and repetitions; but the world was resigned to a kind of elegant certainty that all that could be aimed at was attained.

And, like the style, the subjects fit for poetry and imaginative writing of every kind were already tabulated and understood. The world, which had been so vast and broad, contracted into a narrow sphere where satire was the highest art and social

manners the only subject. To correct society in its vices, and hold up the mirror to its foibles, was the great and only end of literature. "An unfortunate lady," the victim of some Lovelace, or an impersonation of avarice or envy, were the emblems of the passions. Such landscapes as existed were made up of velvet lawns and savage torrents, with Dryads and Naiads, and urns and fountains; and when the chief poet of the age would charm the world with delicate fancy and heroic verse, the pleasant theft of a lady's curl was the subject of his muse. Thus everything was artificial in the sphere where once the loftiest imagination reigned. Titania's fairies, so well met by moonlight, the airy creatures of the woods and groves, turned into legions of sly little imps full of knowing adjustments, who kept safe the magic circle of Belinda's petticoat; and hoops and patches took the place of hearts and thoughts. To be sure, there was a good deal of philosophy and instruction of various sorts conveyed in the medium of that melodious verse—sharp and distinct thinkings, character cut with a diamond, classic eclogues, and fine sentiment. There was nothing wanting, in short, which the mind of that time could think of; and all enunciated with clear unhesitating voice in rhymes as correct as Boileau could have desired. It was not according to the genius of the English language; but it was as excellent a rendering of the rules of classic French into English, with a vigorous admixture of English force and robustness, into the foreign medium, as could have been desired. It was a fighting age and never were the

French more distinctively the national enemies of our island; but France was absolute in letters, if not on the field of battle, and from Twickenham to Grub Street everything owned her power.

This great literary epoch was, however, an anomaly. It was foreign from head to foot. Its laws and regulations were all those of another race. We are so much more liberal in our ideas than they were, that nobody attempts to ignore the just claim of the magnates of this period as they did those of their predecessors. However our affections may lie towards Pope, we do justice to his importance and his power; but his art was that of another atmosphere, and when he himself was wound up and accomplished like his verse, the state of affairs left behind was dismal and hopeless as it has rarely been before. Beyond him in his own method nothing more was possible. He had gone as far as man may go in the polish, the finish, the exact and faultless balance of poetical composition, and his art came to an end in him. The Augustan age was accomplished and over, and a dreary interregnum followed. During this interregnum a few fine but faint voices were heard by intervals, belonging neither to the age that was past nor to the new epoch which was still unrevealed. Goldsmith, with a fresh and genial note; Gray, delicate, melodious, and refined; Collins, too classic for the general—like stray birds waking in the night, belated nightingales left solitary, their season over, or thrushes prematurely awakened by some too early gleam of the unaccomplished dawn. But in spite of those mild un-

intentional rebels, the tradition of the ended age bound England still with a bondage difficult to throw off. The poets were gone, but the critics were left; and those *précieuses,* who belong to a still lower depth, echoes and shadows of the critics, had formed themselves into little elegant coteries all over the country to hatch such stray germs of poetry as might be coming into being, and keep them correct, and frame them after the best models. If ever any free-born thing stirred in the obscurity, they did their best to clip its wings.

Things were not much better in the other regions of literature. Johnson still reigned there an autocrat of the severest sway, imposing the clumsy grandeur of his own mode of expression upon the language, and overawing all beginners into imitation of those defects of his ponderous genius which they had no better gift to redeem. He had given much to his generation—a rugged uprightness and scorn for all meaner arts—a noble spirit which would not brook the servility to which literature had so long been bound; but in return he tyrannised over it, and permitted no voice to be heard in his presence, objecting in others to the independence which was his own great title to the respect and admiration of his time. He, too, had exhausted the soil that bore him, and brought its capabilities to an end; and literature, crushed under his weight, could only feebly moan out an allegiance to him, which in its heart it did not feel. The age was dying away ingloriously, failing in all those manifestations of the imagination which are the heart of literature. His-

tory, indeed, and philosophy still throve and flourished; but the last had flitted northwards, and the first, when not in Edinburgh, was over the Channel, hugging herself upon her quiet by the shore of Lake Leman. Richardson, Fielding, and, at a distance, Smollett, had given vigorous life to the novel, a new form of literature in England; but that, too, had fallen silent, though the lively voice of Miss Burney awakened some of the old echoes. The world of English literature was frost-bound; it made small things into great. It had lost the true standard of English, and had learned to measure all merit by the stature of a few individuals, and constrain all voices into one monotonous and imitated tone.

Our present object is to trace the awakening of the new epoch in literature which dawned in the end of the eighteenth century, stretching forward into our own, and not only creating a new code and new laws, but changing the very atmosphere, the scene, the firmament, and bringing in a purer moral, and a higher soul. For this development of higher genius and purified life, the way was prepared by two poets, whom we may call the precursors of the new age. These heralds of the day arose spontaneously at very nearly the same moment to the sight of men, though one was already in the decline of life, and another in the perfect bloom of youthful manhood. From no quarter was it less likely that the new impulse should come than from the rural places in which William Cowper, an invalid and recluse, sick and sad, and sometimes more deeply disabled still, with a cloud of in-

cipient insanity hovering over him, hid himself from the conflicts of the world: or where Robert Burns, a young and vigorous farm-labourer, went whistling after his plough along the Ayrshire furrows. He who took to the solace of verse in order to forget himself and his troubles, and he who "rhymed for fun" as he went about his daily work, were not the leaders any critic would have chosen for the revolution which was to change the face of literature. But happily critics are not consulted on such matters. Spontaneously, to sweeten a life of suffering on one side and of toil on the other, thinking little of any result to follow, inspired by no rebellion or discontent with the mediums used before, and altogether without consent or knowledge of each other, these two strangely chosen reformers awoke to a sense of the power that was in them. To Burns it was a passion, but to Cowper not much more than a pastime. They awoke each in his covert, shadowed over with foliage and greenness, and —far apart from each other, in conditions of life as different as it is possible to conceive, stretched forth each his hand to the worthy work. A hypochondriac and a ploughman! The looker-on might well have laughed at the suggestion that imperial interests of any kind were to be affected by anything they could say or do; but yet between them they set the lamp alight which was to pass to so many gifted hands and lighten all the attentive skies. Fifteen years of the century were yet to run, when almost simultaneously these two poets—precursors of the greatest tide of genius that has flowed into our

country since Shakspeare—began their public work; but we must step back into the shadows—into the actual meridian of the past age, to trace out to the reader what has already been so often done, the training and course of existence which prepared them for their mission.

CHAPTER I.

WILLIAM COWPER.

William Cowper was born in 1731 in the vicarage of Great Berkhampstead in Hertfordshire. At the time of his birth all the former generation of poets was still living and in full utterance. Pope, decrepit and waning, but not in power or in fame, was making his grotto and polishing his verses on his river-side, while Thames flowed sweetly by, but not to the accompaniment of any such song of love and beauty as that which Spenser sang. His "Essay on Man," and several of his most important works, were being produced while the Hertfordshire parson's boy, a little weakly fellow,

> "Delighted with his bauble coach, and wrapped
> In scarlet mantle warm, and velvet-capped,"

was drawn by the gardener Robin "to school along the public way;" Thomson, fat, amiable, and indolent, was manufacturing bad plays, and thinking lazily of the "pleasant land of drowsyhed," which afterwards grew into the "Castle of Indolence;" Gray was scarcely out of those Eton fields to which he has given one of their tenderest recollections. In another region of literature, good Samuel Richardson was beginning to think of

writing letters that should teach the common people, and especially "handsome girls obliged to go out to service," how to conduct themselves in the difficulties in their career, as well as how to frame epistles to their friends; in the fulfilment of which modest design the honest bookseller stumbled somehow into Pamela, and, more wonderful still, into Clarissa, strange product of some occult inspiration, the child of dulness and unsuspected genius; and in this undertaking roused and found out the keener metal of Fielding, who, fired by derision and indignant sense of superiority, placed his hardy tale by the side of the old proser's sentiment —but in so doing was betrayed, he too, by his good angel, into Parson Adams, though all he meant was Joseph Andrews to start with. The works of both come within the period of Cowper's youth. And Johnson, the autocrat of letters, was a poor usher in a school, as yet unwitting of the reign before him. Goldsmith was but just born in another parsonage, in Ireland, though his career was over some years before that of Cowper began in poetry. Such were the existing lights at the moment when this little timid child came into being. They were all congregated in the dingy old London of those days, as he grew towards manhood. And beyond that busy scene the larger world extended full of event and commotion. The reign was that of George II., or rather of Caroline, a nobler sovereign. Sir Robert Walpole was in the midst of his long and steady sway as Prime Minister, and Bolingbroke was assailing him with vigorous wit and logic. Handel was in Windsor, associating the

English name with a new development of grave and noble music, a loan from Germany more harmonious than that of the royal family, still scarcely acclimatised among us; and Garrick, still little known, was directing his thoughts to the elevation of the stage. Beyond the Channel there were plenty of notable figures revealed or on the point of revelation: Frederick the Great, awaiting the event which was to bring about the seven years' war—the death of the emperor; Maria Theresa, that emperor's daughter, one of the greatest sovereigns of her race, and not likely to turn out so easy a victim as a young woman ought to have done; Louis XV. in France, lost in depravity and bankruptcy, fostering those seeds of the revolution which his father had sown. Fontenoy and Dettingen, and also—a miserable parallel to battles of which Englishmen are still proud—Culloden, were all fought when Cowper was a boy. The young Chevalier, hapless adventurer, stormed through the one historical moment of his life, had his hour of triumph in faithful Scotland, and half seized England by surprise, during the same peaceful childhood. It was an exciting age, with news by every lumbering post and slow-paced waggon, such as set men's hearts beating; news that was sometimes of victory, yet sometimes also of trouble: the French interfering with our trade, the Spanish pirates maltreating our seamen on the high seas; our footing on the American continent, and faint beginning of our empire in India, kept in check by the nimble and adroit neighbour who was our national enemy: and England

standing at bay, holding her own in all parts of her dominion, somewhat desperately abroad, and often with a panic at home, with melancholy prophets declaring loudly that her greatness was at an end, and her ruin near.

It is a very peaceful little vignette of life which rises before us against that stormy background, when we turn to Cowper's own tender recollections of his childhood, that picture made after fifty years, of the only home that had ever belonged to him, the "pastoral house" of which nobody now remembered that it had once been his. The memories of so young a child —for he was not six when his mother died, and its happiness was over—never perhaps were the foundation of so perfect a picture: the child so truly infantile, the mother so vague and benign a vision, the pensive and shadowy sweetness of the recollection, carry it direct to the reader's heart.

"Thy maidens, grieved themselves at my concern.
Oft gave me promise of thy quick return,
What ardently I wished, I long believed,
And disappointed still, was still deceived;
By expectation every day beguiled,
Dupe of to-morrow even from a child.
Thus many a sad to-morrow came and went
Till all my stock of infant sorrow spent,
I learnt at last submission to my lot,
And though I less deplored thee, ne'er forgot."

Thus sorrow and disappointment ended the first brief chapter of his baby-life. He had not a happy youth, for he had no home, no natural shelter to

return to in the little troubles of his school career; and no doubt this want gave double bitterness to the childish unhappiness which the gloom of his maturer days exaggerated in its turn. Unfortunately, the only record of his boyhood is the sombre account of it given by himself in after years, when the disposition to increase all the darker shades in his unregenerate days was strong upon him, as it was in most of those who thought as he did. From this account the credulous reader might be led to suppose that the poor little timid boy was depraved from his earliest years, and had been brought up by a succession of wicked people, all conspiring to heighten the natural blackness of his character, and put him beyond the reach of amendment. He grew wickeder and wickeder in his schoolboy days; he became an adept "in the infernal art of lying;" he had no sentiments of contrition, nor thoughts of God and eternity. About all this there seems a curious, but very evident self-delusion. Poet though he was, Cowper's power of realising his own distant past seems to have failed him. He remembered the child in the gentle quiet of the nursery, the mother's nightly visits and morning ministrations; but he forgot the boy who had played in the shadow of the Abbey, and rattled over the stony pavement in Dean's Yard; for there are other indications artlessly afforded by the very story itself, which prove that he was neither very sad nor very wicked. He played cricket and football, and excelled in these manly games; he formed a number of friendships which lasted into mature life; and to all appearance led his

little existence in a harmless gentle way, liked by everybody, and with no tragical melancholy about him. Even the horror of public schools, which he expresses in his poems, is modified by unconscious admissions, "We love the play place of our infant days," he is betrayed into saying, even in the midst of his denunciations; and, beguiled from theory into recollection, lets his fancy stray to that charming picture of "the little ones unbuttoned, glowing hot" in full tide of those enjoyments which he too shared, before it occurred to him that he was depraved and miserable—

> "The pleasing spectacle at once excites
> Such recollections of our own delights,
> That viewing it, we seem almost to attain
> Our innocent, sweet, simple years again."

Thus poetry rights the balance against the gloomy theory of life which swallowed up so much of Cowper's manhood; and he who has just maligned his childhood in prose inadvertently vindicates it in verse.

Of his youth we have the same dark description, with the same breaks and openings in it to show a different reality below. When he left Westminster School, he entered an attorney's office, where he was again miserable enough, to take his own jaundiced account of it; but when we correct this by the inadvertent admissions made at cheerful moments, the picture undergoes a pleasant change. The formal narrative continues to give us gloomy glimpses of a weak and wretched youth, but the unintentional reve-

lation is of a much more cheerful character. If he was idle and foolish, he was at the same time happy and gay, shirking his work perhaps, but for no more reprehensible indulgence than that of hanging about the pleasant house of his uncle, where there were girls and innocent diversion. "I did actually live three years with Mr. Chapman," he writes afterwards to Lady Hesketh, one of those girls, "that is to say, I slept three years in his house; but I lived, that is to say I spent my days, in Southampton Row, as you very well remember. There was I and the future Lord Chancellor constantly employed from morning to night in giggling, and making giggle, instead of following the law. Oh fie, cousin! how could you do so?" That Thurlow, the stern and saturnine, should have been his companion in happy levity, is as remarkable as that the laughing boy should afterwards have seen this careless episode under so gloomy a light. Thurlow's giggle is far more unaccountable than Cowper's, who kept the faculty of laughter all his life; and it is astonishing that the constant companionship of such a vigorous and dominant spirit should not have had more influence upon his gentle companion. But Cowper, being indisposed to effort by nature, was in circumstances which made his idleness as excusable as idleness can ever be. These were the days of sinecures and patronage. And he had influential connections, and in all probability felt his future to be assured. He was free to dally in the primrose paths, and happy in doing so. He helped to keep his uncle's house full of gentle mirth and

frolic; and he fell in love, as was natural, with his uncle's daughter. When his apprenticeship to the attorney was over, and he began to live alone in chambers in the Temple, his biographers seem to agree that the coming cloud threw its first shadow over him; but then they are all painfully on the outlook for this coming cloud; and it is hard to believe that a man could lead a very gloomy life who was a member of the "Nonsense Club, consisting of seven Westminster men, who dined together every Thursday," and who was distinguished by what was then called "restlessness," but which we should now call love of change and variety. His letters of this period represent him in anything but a dismal light. He tells us, indeed, that his life was "spent in an uninterrupted course of sinful indulgence," but that is a vague phrase which may mean anything, from actual vice to absence from church and dislike of early rising. He was, however—which is more fatal even than actual transgression—destitute of personal power and energy to an extraordinary extent, amiable and loving, but incapable of any sacrifice, honourable and honest, yet content to be dependent: a paradox not uncommon, but always involving misery. He loved, as such men love, his cousin Theodora; but her father having objected to the marriage, the lover seems to have made no effort to render it possible. All that we know of her, which is little enough, denotes a high-spirited girl who would have been capable of bearing the burden of her companion's helplessness. But Cowper had not the courage or the earnestness to

overcome his uncle's scruples. Ashley Cowper was not a stern or alarming parent. When he died, his nephew's hand records his character in terms of gentle enthusiasm—

> "Endowed with all that could engage
> All hearts to love thee both in youth and age;
> In prime of life for sprightliness enrolled,
> Among the gay, yet virtuous as the old;
> In life's last stage (oh, blessings rarely found!)
> Pleasant as youth with all its blossoms crowned;
> Through every period of this changeful state,
> Unchanged thyself—wise, good, affectionate."

This was not a man to refuse to hear reason; but it is evident all through his life that William Cowper was not capable of great and generous effort, even for one he loved. Throughout his life he accepts but never makes sacrifices. He is affectionate, sweet, and caressing, no one more pleasant to serve, more grateful, more tender. Whatever was done for him, he was most delightfully ready to acknowledge; but all this is quite consistent with a kind of selfishness to which people generally shrink from giving its right name—a selfishness so refined and exquisite that the very sufferers by it often adore the amiable attractive weakness. No indication of any effort on his part to overcome the opposition of the family appears in the record—

> "Her, through tedious years of doubt and pain,
> Fixed in her choice, and faithful, but in vain"—

he does indeed give one poetical tear to: but he does not seem to have paid Theodora even the com-

pliment of faithfulness, since very soon after their separation he writes to a friend of a certain "lovely and beloved little girl," with whom he had spent a blessed three days, though he adds with the same resignation, that the approaching return of this "bright star" to the West Indies, in which region "it had risen," will leave him "nothing but sighs and tears." He was very willing to be loved and happy, but not to secure the possession even of happiness by the sacrifice of ease or leisure, or any personal comfort. He was, however, of the celibate class, which is as clearly indicated by nature as any other division of humanity, born to know no passion, but to be affectionately dependent upon the affection of women in all relations of life save one.

The "seven Westminster men" who formed the Nonsense Club brought Cowper at least within the circle of the literary life of the period. Among them were Bonnel Thornton and George Colman the dramatist, who edited, or rather wrote between them, a paper called the *Connoisseur*, to which Cowper is believed to have contributed several short articles. He was thus attached to literature as most young men of literary tastes who have come with fair repute through their preliminary education are so likely to be, by a link of association at least and sympathy, and perhaps some mild pleasure in seeing themselves in print. He wrote verses too, as so many do, without special promise, or any indication that he was in the future to surpass, or even to attain to an equality with his two companions, who gave him the chance of

helping them in their more ambitious efforts. The literary profession may be said to consist rather of men like these, who take up the art of writing as a trade, with considerable immediate fluency, but no particular inspiration, nor any faculty of continuance in them, than of the greater writers, who so often fall to their work by a different impulse altogether, often without any distinct intention in their minds, or consciousness of what is coming. Thornton and Colman were of the same class as that large and flourishing branch of the profession which is now occupied in journalistic work; but their productions were curiously different in form. The *Connoisseur* was one of the successors of the *Rambler*, and Johnson himself is said to have contributed to it; it was a little brochure filled with little essays upon general subjects, upon classical literature, and upon the manners and morals of the time. A big broadsheet such as occupies us now, full of news and political events, had then no existence: and this was the form of the periodical press in those days. It was the ebb of the wave which the *Spectator* had begun, and which Johnson had revived. Cowper contributed to the *Connoisseur* a playful little paper upon the art of keeping secrets, just as nowadays he might have sent a disquisition on the Irish land laws or sanitary science. The two editors, however, produced it almost entirely by their own exertions. "We have not only joined in the work taken together, but almost every single paper is the joint product of both," they announced in their concluding number;

and it is curious to see the inexperienced young Templar, who was their schoolfellow, but had none of their pretensions in literature, adventuring the pen which afterwards produced work so much more important than theirs in the little essays of this short-lived periodical, without any prevision in his mind or theirs of the very different level upon which he and they should stand hereafter.

Another pair of Cowper's literary schoolfellows were Lloyd and Churchill, persons much less safe and respectable than the others, but, like them, Westminster men. Long years after, when Cowper had gone to the other extreme of feeling, and might have been supposed to be entirely alienated from a man so profane both in literature and life, he still admired Churchill and his poetry with that loyal support of the school hero, which is one of the most tenacious and faithful of prejudices. Lloyd was the son of a Westminster master, under whom Cowper had worked as a boy, and for whom he in after years wrote a touching epitaph; and he too was the editor of a little weekly periodical, the *St. James's Magazine*, which he was apparently expected to compose entirely himself, with what little gratuitous assistance he could receive from his friends. He had taken refuge in letters (so called), in this curious journalism and trade of essay-writing, as his only means of escape from the life of a schoolmaster, which he found intolerable; but the magazine was apparently more doleful drudgery still. Cowper was also a modest contributor to this periodical. He wrote in it a

dissertation on the modern ode, signed with his initials; but he is not referred to in the list of names which are quoted in the preliminary poetical dialogue between the author and the bookseller, nor is there the slightest reason to believe that he was even thought of as likely to be of serious importance in any literary undertaking. The following scrap, out of a rhymed letter addressed by him to Lloyd, will show the modesty of his own ideas, and the unobtrusive position he was acknowledged to occupy beside his friend. It is interesting also as giving almost the earliest intimation of that despondency which later seized upon Cowper with such infernal force:—

> " 'Tis not that I design to rob
> Thee of thy birthright, gentle Bob.
> For thou art born sole heir, and single,
> Of dear Mat Prior's easy jingle;
> Not that I mean, while thus I knit
> My threadbare sentiments together,
> To show my genius or my wit,
> When God and you know, I have neither;
> Or such, as might be better shown
> By letting poetry alone.
> 'Tis not with either of these views,
> That I presumed t' address the Muse:
> But to divert a fierce banditti,
> (Sworn foes to everything that's witty!)
> That, with a black, infernal train,
> Make cruel inroads in my brain,
> And daily threaten to drive thence
> My little garrison of sense:
> The fierce banditti, which I mean,
> Are gloomy thoughts, led on by spleen."

He was living alone in his chambers in the Temple when these lines were written, in cheerful intercourse with this set of clever, ingenious, and by no means straitlaced young men, all bound together by the most natural of ties—eyeing their perturbations and excitement with the eye of an interested spectator, but by no means embarking in the same risky career, or venturing upon anything but the occasional little essay of an amateur, doing not much of anything indeed, apparently making no attempt to practise the profession to which he nominally belonged; for he had been called to the bar, little as that meant in those days. "My resolution is," he says in one of his early letters to another of his youthful friends, "never to be melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits." Apparently nothing could have been more reckless and imprudent than this happy-go-lucky existence, especially as he proposed to follow it as a matter of principle and philosophy. "This provokes me," he writes, "that a covetous dog who will work by candlelight in a morning to get what he does not want shall be praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants rather than work like an ass to relieve them. Did you ever in your life know a man who was guided in the general course of his actions by anything but his natural temper?" Cowper was over thirty when he asked this pregnant question, so that it was no bravado of extreme youth. He was not rich enough to live such a life, and at that age it was a somewhat wretched way to be spending

those precious sands of existence which run so quickly through careless fingers. So far as appears, he had never made an honest effort of any kind in his life. His money was streaming thriftlessly away, and so were his best years; the schoolboy pranks of the Nonsense Club, the *pococurante* existence growing stale in its uselessness—and underneath all, it is scarcely possible to doubt, an under-current of that self-contempt which saps all energy, and engenders a listless hopelessness not energetic enough to be called despair, but even more dismal—were all he had to represent life. It is scarcely possible to believe that such an existence could have gone on without some crisis to come.

Few events in history are better known than this crisis when it did come. The story has been told over and over again, and almost always, so attractive is the character of the man, with tenderness and sympathy. As a matter of fact, he who was to glorify and idealise the domestic routine of the most secluded life was up to this period of mature manhood living in a way as little praiseworthy or respectable as can be imagined, doing nothing, attempting nothing, and shutting his eyes to the future as far as was possible; but the principle of his existence afterwards was little changed, though the result was so different. The letter from which we have quoted is full of a subtle consciousness that his position is a false one. His self-excuses are self-accusations—"There is a degree of poverty which has no disgrace belonging to it," he says; "that degree, I mean, in

which a man enjoys clean linen and good company; and if I never sink below this degree of it, I care not if I ever rise above it." But his "natural temper," that which he concludes with terrible justice to be the only rule by which a man is ever guided, was not more entirely the inspiration of his life in the Temple, than it was of the very different life at Olney, which he would have professed and believed to be governed by rules entirely opposite. He is quite consistent throughout. He would not if he could, and, as it turned out, he could not if he would, take his fate in his own hands. He could flow on with the stream that caught him, whatever it might be. His fits of insanity give a tragic piteousness to the story, and the extreme misery involved takes all power of judgment and wish to exercise it from the sympathetic spectator; but still the fact remains that Cowper had trained himself to incapacity, as other men do to work. He had let everything go from him; nothing in the world, not love itself, not independence, far less ambition, were worth to him the effort of seizing them. In all probability his appointment, if it had come to him at twenty-two instead of thirty-two, would have found him by no means so tragically helpless; but this is a useless conjecture. "Many years ago, cousin," he writes, while the crisis was impending, to Lady Hesketh, "there was a possibility I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My character is now fixed and riveted fast upon me." Nothing could be more sad or more true.

The event which brought this aimless existence to a climax was one to which all Cowper's training, such as it was, had tended—the piece of looked-for good fortune which had been the only justification of his previous indolence. All this time a lucrative and important office had been destined for him, and the time had now come when he could enter upon it. The place of Clerk to the Journals in the House of Lords, which was in the gift of his relation, Major Cowper, fell vacant by the death of the previous occupant, while at the same time two other offices of greater value, and held conjointly, were resigned by their holder. Major Cowper, by one of those inexplicable arrangements common at that period, was "the patentee of these appointments," and he at once, as no doubt was fully expected of him, offered the best paid and most important of them to his kinsman. "Dazzled by so splendid a proposal, and not immediately reflecting upon my incapacity to execute a business of so public a nature, I at once accepted it," he says; but the very next moment "seemed to receive a dagger in my heart." It was the lesser appointment, that of Clerk to the Journals, which he had hoped for, chiefly, as it would seem, because "the business of the place was transacted in private;" and as he had been, or fancied himself to have been, so wicked as to "express an earnest wish" for the death of the official then holding it, it was perfectly natural to him afterwards to believe that "the spirit of a murderer" was in his heart, and that all the misery that followed was sent to him as "an immediate

punishment of my crime." After a week of dismal ponderings over the great prospect before him, Cowper at last entreated his kinsman to give the better appointment to another friend, and allow him to drop into the safer obscurity of the place he had originally desired. This expedient laid both Major Cowper and his nominee open to the imputation of a job, "since nothing would be so likely to bring a suspicion of bargain and sale upon his nomination, which the Lords would not have endured, as his appointment of so near a relative to the least profitable office, while the most valuable was allotted to a stranger." The risk, however, had to be run; and a "momentary calm" took possession of Cowper's mind when he saw this safe and quiet position behind backs opening to him. But whether "the Lords" suspected, as was supposed likely, a disgraceful transaction behind (*bien entendu*, it was neither disgraceful nor undesirable that the "patentee" should use his power for the advantage of one of his own blood, natural affection in this important particular being fully recognised as the rule of the public service), it is certain that an opposition arose, and Cowper "was bid to expect an examination at the bar of the House, touching my sufficiency for the post I had taken." This unforeseen and unprecedented ordeal drove him frantic. Nobody, so far as we are aware, has instanced the proposal as a proof either of the advantages or disadvantages of the principle of examination, which is now the key to every door—yet it affords a curious commentary upon the uses of that method. It drove Cowper into

insanity; but perhaps even in this elementary and arbitrary stage of its existence it was beneficial in its way. Had he stolen in quietly to his place, and reaped its placid advantages without any such alarming preliminary, he might perhaps never have been insane, never have gone to Olney, never written poetry to console a spirit, which in that case might neither have been sick nor sorry. There is no end to conjecture, and everything, as the poet himself would have been the first to allow, works for good. The world pays cheaply for a great work and influence when the sufferings of one forlorn individual are all the price that is demanded. It was hard upon the poet, but good for the race. The "Task" was of far more importance to the general welfare than the happiness of one young man about town; and his happiness was not of a very warm or genuine description that its temporary extinction should have called forth so many moans.

Thus the unfortunate young man was out of the pleasant indolence and carelessness of his unthrifty life, plunged all unprepared and incapable into that mäelstrom which now, under the easy title of "going in for an examination," is so universally known to the youth of our time. In those days slang was not, at least in this kind; and that fact of itself made everything more serious. No pleasing levity, no light-hearted calculations of chance, modified the terrible ordeal. "A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence," he says. "I knew to demonstration that upon these terms the clerkship of

the journals was no place for me. To require my attendance at the bar of the House, that I might there publicly qualify myself for the office, was in fact to exclude me from it. In the meantime, the interest of my friend, the honour of his choice, my own reputation and circumstances, all urged me forward—all pressed me to undertake that which I saw to be impracticable. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves on any occasion is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation: others can have none."

In this state of mind he began to study the work that would be required of him, going daily to the office, trying to extort information from the books, without help, without capacity or habit of investigation—and exposed, as he thought rightly or wrongly, to the hostility of all the inferior clerks and everybody around. The state of mind into which he gradually worked himself can, as he says, only be divined by those to whom the same conditions of mental enervation, feebleness, self-indulgence, and excited imagination are possible. The robust mind, or even that which, weak in itself, is braced by habits of self-subordination, would, but for the pity of it, be disposed to turn with a certain contempt from the pitiable sight. But the issue gives to this hopeless struggle the solemnity of a tragedy; and it is impossible to read Cowper's account of his growing madness, the gradual subjection of all his powers to the one fixed horror, from which he could not

escape, the gloomy door of suicide that seemed to open and shut, as by a fitful wind, in front of him; his attempts, always feeble, and restrained by the very weakness that moved him to it, to push that door wide, and make his frightened exit thereby—without feeling the strange fascination of the struggle. A hunted soul in restless conflict with its own delusions, sometimes flying before the dark crowd of excited fancies which might be spirits of darkness for anything he could tell or see, sometimes standing miserably at bay; the world shut out from that strange solitude in which he moved alone, turning every incident vaguely perceived through the mist, every encounter of men's faces and voices, into agents in the chase to which he was subject, driving him nearer and nearer to the precipice — this strange and wild picture forms the greatest contrast to the tranquil pictures he was to leave to us as his contribution to the wealth of England; but it has in it a force of passionate feeling which they do not possess, and which will always make it painfully interesting to the student of humanity and life.

And nothing can be more strange than to realise the background of busy and cheerful and trivial existence upon which this agony stands out. The Nonsense Club continued its existence as long at least as Cowper kept above water, and its pranks were sometimes amusing enough. Among them was an exhibition of signboards, got up by Thornton in ridicule of the annual exhibitions of pictures which preceded the establishment of the Royal Academy

and its yearly show. It may be easily imagined how the names of taverns would lend themselves to this facile joke, and all the fun that might be got out of it—fun of a poor order, but yet suiting the broad and easy fancy of the time, and in which Hogarth, the master of a mode of expression more terrible and withering than this, took a part. And the little company of wits who were Cowper's chief companions were writing their little essays and composing their verses, and as busy about their magazines as if the existence of the world depended upon the getting up of so many monthly pages, while he was going through all this delirious struggle. No doubt these young adventurers thought him better off than any of them, and envied his fate, with his competence to step into, and his powerful friends behind him. One of them came to see him at the very blackest of the struggle, to congratulate him—just after in the revulsion of his distracted heart he had flung the laudanum out of the window. "We conversed awhile with a real cheerfulness on his part, and an affected one on mine; and when he left me I said in my heart, I shall see him no more." The other Westminster lads who had been at school with him, had, to all appearance, a great deal more cause for uneasiness than Cowper: Lloyd breaking down under his work—Churchill writing violent and powerful verse, in bad odour with the authorities, and wretched in remorseful vice at home—were both drawing near the end of their tragedy, and were in every external respect far

more to be pitied than their old schoolfellow. They died about a year after, the one of a broken heart for the loss of the other, having wasted their faculties, and stained their names in the brief career through which they had stormed so wildly. Churchill was exactly Cowper's age, his friend a little younger. And thus they dropped before either was half-way over the path of life. On the other hand Colman had turned his efforts to the stage, and had become a successful writer of plays, a friend of Garrick. At the same time, though altogether outside of this little society, Goldsmith was going through his serio-comic troubles, impounded by his landlady, liberated by Johnson, writing some of the most immortal works of the age, but smiled if not laughed at by all the contemporaries who were so much wiser than the reckless Irishman, who "wrote like an angel, and talked like poor Poll." It is curious that the two circles should have flourished so near to each other without touching, and that no echo of Johnson's heavy foot and autocratic speech should have sounded into the precincts in which Cowper was inclosed. Yet from Fleet Street to the Temple was not far, and no doubt the sweet-tempered and courteous young idler from that hive of gaiety and folly, wit and wisdom, must have stood aside upon the busy pavement many a time, while the big frame of "the great lexicographer" lumbered along, scarcely guided by his dim eyes. But they might have been in different worlds for all we hear mutually of their existence—Cowper, always the very embodiment of gentle manners

and suave consideration, was very probably repelled by Johnson's rude superiority—and Goldsmith's vanity and swagger would be still less to the taste of the well-born and fastidious gentleman. They would seem never to have crossed each other—a thing which gives us a strange perception of the coteries into which London was divided.

It was on the very morning of the day on which he was to make his appearance at the bar of the House of Lords for the dreaded examination, that Cowper made his last and most strenuous effort at suicide. The previous ones had been but intentions, but this was carried the length of action, and when it failed by the breaking of the cord with which he had hanged himself, the unfortunate young man, on recovering consciousness, sent with the courage of desperation for his kinsman and patron. Major Cowper seems to have been as prompt as his young relation was weak. He asked at once for the papers of nomination, and carried them off with him on the spot. And so the dreaded ordeal was averted, but not the consequences of all this excitement and misery. The one immediate cause of anguish being removed, Cowper's mind, now thoroughly astray, and excited into a habit of self-torture, sought about it for another. It was only then that his sufferings took the turn of religion. The magnitude of the sin he had been about to commit suddenly became evident to him, and the misery of earthly panic turned into an agony of remorse. He had "felt no concern of a spiritual kind up to this time"—

but now the sense of the crime he had almost committed seized upon him like a lion. In every book he opened—not the Bible only, but every printed page, even those of the old dramatists—he found some winged words which transfixed him. Never man had been so guilty—never man had sinned so terribly. God was against him and all good angels, as well as men. He had committed the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost. Life was better than death, only because it delayed a little the burning fire of eternal punishment. This gradually heightening horror, coming not from without but within, rolling upwards in heavy vapours that hid both sky and sun, out of his perturbed and anguished being, came at last the length of unmistakable madness. While he was still capable of some effort of mind, he sent for a friend and family connection, Martin Madan, who was one of the new sect of Evangelicals, roused by Wesley and his associates to make a new and much-needed revolution in the religious life of the country, and got some temporary consolation from him; but the evil by this time had gone too far to be cured. A copy of Sapphics, to which he gave vent at this terrible moment, places before us in tuneless tumultuous lines the horror that possessed his soul. Not poetry but misery produced them; he had not as yet found out the way to speak in his own voice and manner. A forlorn echo of his studies, the artificial utterance of the schools had to suffice him in his wretchedness.

"Hatred and vengeance,—my eternal portion
Scarce can endure delay of execution,
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
Soul in a moment.

"Damned below Judas; more abhorred than he was,
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master!
Twice betrayed, Jesus, me, the last delinquent
Deems the profanest.

"Man disavows and Deity disowns me,
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;
Therefore, Hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all
Bolted against me."

"It will be proper," he says, "to draw a veil over the secrets of my prison-house." It would be a curious question, could we in pity for the woeful spectacle thus set before us, have the heart to investigate it, how much the habit of continual self-reference and unconscious egotism have to do with this peculiar form of mental disease. Individual character is far more involved in intellectual aberration than most people are disposed to admit, and it is our conviction that self-will and self-love will almost invariably be found at the bottom of such failures of the brain. A man of generous temper and large heart—one habitually more occupied with the happiness and comfort of others than with his own, has an armour of proof against this mysterious and terrible disease. But Cowper had laid himself open to its attacks; he had lived the life of a careless egotist for years. He had let everything go from him rather than make the necessary effort to secure anything; and, accordingly, he was quite defenceless when the strain came.

And it was all the more miserable that his malady should have taken a religious form, from the fact that the newly awakened religious feeling of the age was almost entirely introspective. Wesley had awakened his countrymen to a consciousness that this world was not everything—that the unseen and eternal were not only of some importance, but of supreme importance, far exceeding the seen and temporal; but he had not stopped there. He had turned the current of religious feeling, both within and without his own community, into the channel of severe and constant self-examination. He had taught his disciples—and almost every pious person of the time was more or less his disciple—to weigh every feeling and impulse which arose in their minds, and to allow no movement of the affections or fancy to escape their scrutiny. They were intent (in theory) upon themselves as a surgeon is on the subject he is dissecting. The simile is unsavoury, but we know no other so exact. Such a theory is by nature injurious only to the few individuals who are predisposed to enter into its full meaning. Most men have too many clogs of flesh and blood about them, too many sympathies and emotions, too much instinctive and unreasoning confidence in the God that made them, to be driven frantic by it; and accordingly, the good it does to the mass, by teaching them the profound importance of right feelings, motives, and wishes, and by putting spiritual religion in its true place, as something above and beyond mere external observances, is probably tenfold more than the harm it has done in creating the

sin of spiritual selfishness. But Cowper had not the safeguards that protect the mass of humanity. This form of religion tended to increase by every means, and as it were to legitimatise and give a heavenly sanction to those habits of mind from which his madness came. To cure him of that tragic self-importance which made him perceive in himself a kind of antagonist to God, pursued implacably by divine wrath and contended for by all the powers of darkness—an enemy so important that heaven departed from its usual rules and made war against him *à outrance*—the religion of his day set him to self-examination. It taught him to regard God as perpetually watchful of his smallest movements, noting everything with a vigilant eye, more easily angered than a jealous woman, insisting on a share in every thought. Instead of the "larger, other eyes than ours," with which the gentler philosophy of to-day endows even the departed spirits of human race, the sign of God's greatness to Wesley and to Newton was the minuteness of His all-inspection, the ceaseless, breathless watch He kept upon every word and every thought. And when it is fully realised what this means; when the reader represents to himself the effect upon a sensitive mind of such a constant unremitting surveillance; when he thinks of the poor solitary half-insane human creature feeling himself surrounded by the austere, all-penetrating light of eyes that watch him waking and sleeping, watch him in his weakness, in his dreams, at the table, among his books, whatever he does or thinks or says, taking account of everything and laying up an awful score of

unconsidered sins against the judgment day,—can he wonder that Cowper's madness came back again and again, and was the persistent shadow of his life? This was how the most pious men of his time regarded God. It is how human nature, at all times, is most apt to regard Him, being so seldom able to divest itself of a deep consciousness of guilt towards Him. These men spoke much of the Saviour and spiritual joy; but it did not occur to them that God's loving and large comprehension of our confused ways and works must be not less but infinitely more indulgent and tender than that of any man. Yet this was the theory of existence which such a mind as Cowper's wanted, and in which was its only hope.

He was placed under the charge of Dr. Cotton in St. Alban's, an excellent physician, a good man, and, according to the fashion of his time, a creditable poet, who sympathised as deeply with his religious anxieties as a perfectly sane man could do, and did what he could to help the anguished spirit not only by medical care and treatment, but by spiritual counsel. It is impossible for us to discriminate in such a case the delicate line which separates disease of the body from trouble of the soul, but at the same time it is very difficult (though it happens to be the fashion of the present moment) to obliterate that line altogether, and accept Cowper's malady as purely physical. To say of his recovery what his latest biographer, Mr. Goldwin Smith, says, in an essay which is discriminative and just on most points—that Cowper's recovery "was brought about, as we can plainly see, by medical treat-

ment wisely applied ; but it came in the form of a burst of religious faith and hope,"—seems to us somewhat absurd, and not a little unscientific, though supposed to be in accordance with the latest scientific tenets. At the best it is but a conjecture that religious faith and hope can be produced by a regulation of the digestive organs. Few people manage to buy happiness even in smaller matters by such inexpensive means. However, by whatsoever means attained—in all probability by many means acting together—by calm, and the absence of causes of external irritation ; by the wearing out of the paroxysm of insane delusion, by the soothing influence of religious intercourse : and, finally, by that inexplicable power which nobody may understand, but which it is impossible to ignore—called grace, conversion, light from heaven, by the associates whom Cowper now chiefly prized, and only very lamely and vaguely accounted for by the philosophers as a reformed digestion—the sick man got well. He did more than get well ; a tremulous and exquisite happiness took the place of his anguish and despair. We may safely say that if any physician could promise to his patients by any kind of physical treatment, such a result of blessedness as that attained by this weak and troubled spirit, no sanitary establishment in the world would be so crowded, no ministrant to the mind diseased so richly and amply rewarded as that physician would be.

Had his history ended here, it would scarcely have been more remarkable than that of a host of converts whose transition from a profane and secular to a

religious life, has been marked by not unsimilar agonies. But Cowper was not altogether delivered, and his career had still many dark vicissitudes. He was "converted" and happy, but he had still the same indolent and unoccupied being, the same limited sphere of gentle self-absorption, as before; and never escaped out of that narrow circle into the wider influences even of a family, where egotism has at least the excuse of being doubled or quadrupled, and where self must give way to other selves, if not to any broad rule of generous self-abandonment. He was two years at St. Alban's, under the charge of Dr. Cotton; and when he leaves that scene of his sufferings and recovery there is a touching air of subdued tranquillity and convalescence about him, which forms a tender background to the ecstasies which have now taken the place of his former fits of intolerable anguish. He came to Huntingdon in the year 1765. No particular reason seems to have influenced his brother in making choice of this place of residence for him, except that it was near — and happily not too near — to Cambridge, where John Cowper, the only surviving member of the family, a Fellow of his college, usually resided. He was a kind brother, but probably was not prepared to take upon him the entire charge of such an invalid, or to wear out his own spirit with the constant sight of one who had become an embarrassment to all his friends. Huntingdon was near enough to permit frequent visits—the brothers saw each other every week, we are told—but it was not too near. There was not at this time any

sympathy between them on the religious topics of which William Cowper's mind was now full. His brother contemplated his new rapture, as he had contemplated his former sufferings, with the uneasiness of a spectator who was by no means sure that there was not something more important than all else in heaven and earth, in those convulsions of the spirit—which, nevertheless, were madness to his common sense, and offensive to the beliefs he had held during all his life. Four years later, John Cowper was himself converted, and died with something of the same rapture of religious certainty which now and then glorified his brother's life.

This choice, however, so inadvertent as it seems to have been, of Huntingdon as the future home of the convalescent, led to remarkable results. Here Cowper dropped apparently by hazard into the strange little dull town (yet not so dull either; but possessed of diversions such as put the economy of little towns in our own day to shame), without introductions, without an acquaintance, found what he might have sought over a whole world without finding, had he sought it consciously—the one friend in the world from whom he was never to be separated more. It seems a strange kind of discipline for an invalid, to set him down thus in an obscure corner, without occupation, or amusement, or companions; but in all likelihood his friends were at their wits' end what to do with him, and glad to have him peaceably put out of sight anywhere, as the kindest friends are apt to do with an amiable but impracticable dependent of this class. Cowper had

been proved incapable of taking care of himself, or enduring the ordinary struggles of life; he had not nearly enough to live on, yet he was expensive and generous in a way which no man without money has a right to be. He had a man-servant in attendance upon him, and he had also taken up and was providing for a boy who had interested him. Most likely, all the Cowpers though very kind and faithful to him, were thankful that he should be safely withdrawn out of the way. And his friends in London seem either to have dropped from him, or been dropped by him, in the time of his illness. The only one with whom he continued to correspond was Joseph Hill, one of the least-known members of the Nonsense Club, an undistinguished, good man, who had taken charge of his friend's affairs and stood by him all his life. Nonsense Clubs and all such follies were far from Cowper's thoughts now. His cousin, Lady Hesketh, the sister of Theodora, who had always been his faithful friend, resumed correspondence with him when he re-emerged out of the cloud. But except these two and his brother, he brought no old alliances with him out of his former life. He was the more ready for the new tie which awaited him here.

A great deal has been said about the poet's connection with Mrs. Unwin, and perhaps the greater proportion of the public from his day to this have entertained the idea that the love between them was more or less the love of lovers, and that it might (and in the opinion of many ought to) have led to marriage. Except one statement brought forward by Mr. Benham

in the biography prefixed to the Globe edition of Cowper's works—a statement of something which Mr. Bull remembered to have "heard his father say," backed by an extract from an unpublished diary of Newton's—there seems no evidence, except that he was a man and she a woman, for this idea. The relations between them were evidently as calm, as sober, and as simply affectionate as if their bond had been one not of choice but of nature. And in all the revelations of himself and his ways which he poured forth during their long companionship—revelations in which the most sacred things of life are conjoined with the most trivial—there is not one word which could lend the most far-away support to this notion. Not the least shade of shyness or self-consciousness is upon either of the friends: their connection was so simply a matter of fact, so clearly recognised by all who belonged to them on both sides, exciting no jealousy or alarm on either, that nothing but the popular prejudice against the possibility of such friendship could, in our opinion, have suggested the thought. It is the most perfect example on record of a relationship so difficult, yet so beautiful; and perhaps only under circumstances so peculiar—circumstances in which the man owed everything to the woman, and never was otherwise than dependent upon her support and affection—could it be possible to maintain it. The vulgar mind rejects it altogether, and the experienced though not vulgar, doubt; but it begins to be more possible in the present day, when our Protestant deification of marriage has ceased to be polemical, to realise the existence of a

class which is celibate by nature, and neither wishes nor requires to marry—a class to which, we are convinced, Cowper belonged. The reader, perhaps, will always decide the question according to his own bias, but we by no means agree that it is settled by the piece of evidence above quoted. Here is a man most voluminous in letter-writing, who has babbled (charmingly, delightfully, in a way few men can do—yet the word is not unjust) about everything that happened to him, great and small. Yet we have to wait a century, until somebody chooses to print an extract from a friend's diary, for information of what might have been the most important step in his life. However, we do not suppose that argument is likely to affect the question one way or another.

When Cowper first made acquaintance with the Unwins, Mr. Unwin was still alive, and the family consisted of four persons, son and daughter, as well as the father and mother. His first friend was the son; but it was the mother always whose society attracted him the most. "She and I walked together near two hours in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company," he says. He was thus brought within reach of an influence which was more suited to his wants than any other. He who at fifty could say that his mother, whom he lost at six, had never been out of his thoughts for a week together, thus recovered in a moment the maternal

aid of which his enfeebled life stood in need. It is ridiculous to speak of the relationship of mother and son, between a man of thirty-six and a woman of forty-three; but so are many other things ridiculous, which at the same time are the source of great individual happiness. There are cases in which a very young woman is capable of occupying the position of a mother to brothers and sisters who may even be older than herself. Mrs. Unwin took this feeble soul in hand, not in the right of superior strength, but of benignity and kindness, understanding all that he most wanted. He had no woman belonging to him, no one to whom he could give the thousand confidences which, kept within himself, wounded and overwhelmed him—and to whom he could look for that sympathy, which penetrated to every act of his life and every crevice of his thoughts. She did not ask more than he could give in return. His shy bachelorhood was never invaded. Till their last breath he was Mr. Cowper to the serene matron, who was his Mary, the object of a perpetual claim and demand on his part, the claim of weakness and dependence. But one great charm of the relationship to such a man no doubt lay in the fact that there was no balancing claim upon her side. She wanted nothing from him but the tranquil companionship which was his happiness.

When her husband died, the two were left alone together, the son going out into life into a sphere of his own, the daughter marrying, and following her husband and separate fortunes. The widow and her harmless lodger chose Olney as their place of

refuge, not from any attraction in the dull and unlovely village, but for the sake of John Newton, the curate of the place—a man who belongs to the history of literature in one of its lesser walks, but whose strong and notable individuality has more to do with the religious excitement of the time than with any other of its developments. He was the true type of a converted sinner turned into a saint; a man of strong character and ceaseless activity, whose early life had gone through all manner of violent changes. His stormy youth had veered from the pious exercises taught him by his mother, to the rude infidelity which was the first reaction from it. He had gone to sea at eleven, in the collier smack of which his father was the skipper; had been impressed under the horrible system then existing, and after various experiences in the pandemonium of a man-o'-war, had entered the slave service; and without any special perception of the evils of that abominable trade, had serenely commanded a slaver for several voyages before illness and some dislike of his profession induced him to return home. Nothing would serve this energetic person then—having already gone through all the preliminaries of conversion, and being as determined, as vehement, and as powerful in this new development as he had been in the old—but to enter the Church of England, and take part in the Evangelical crusade then organising everywhere, and universally opposed by all that thought itself cultivated or learned in society. When he at last attained his desire he became curate of the little Buckingham-

shire town, where, among the lace-workers and straw-plaiters there was much work to be done, and much reformation needed. Newton wrote some spiritual treatises, and had a principal part in the collection of Olney hymns, familiar to the Evangelical party, and the Dissenters who fraternised with it for many years. His acquaintance with Cowper and Mrs. Unwin was of recent date. He had gone to see them at a moment when their hearts were very open to sympathy, immediately after Mr. Unwin's death; and probably out of pity for their forlorn condition, and with an impetuous adoption of them as fellow-saints and congenial spirits, had immediately proposed to take a house for them at Olney, where they could have the consolation of his own spiritual counsel and direction. The attraction must have been great on both sides, for an extreme intimacy, as of members of one family, arose at once between them.

They settled accordingly at Olney. The life the family had lived at Huntingdon had been almost monastic in its routine. Two hours of religious reading or converse in the morning, then morning prayer in church, then religious conversation in the evening, and a concert of hymns to wind up with, had been their regular daily round—a routine which discloses as much absolute leisure and power to do as they pleased, as devotional feeling. But in Olney the time spent in devotion was greatly increased. Instead of the morning service came infinite preaching, prayer meetings in which Cowper himself, notwithstanding his natural timidity and horror of all public appearances, was con-

stantly called upon to officiate, and visiting of the sick and poor. Newton thus inspired his new parishioner to undertake duties more difficult and alarming than those which he had been unable to face, and for fear of which he had all but destroyed himself in London; and it would be difficult to imagine anything more absorbing than such a routine. An infinity of small duties and observances are, next to hard work, the most complete of common expedients for satisfying the restless. Cowper became wholly absorbed in this ceaseless round. Nothing was talked of, nothing thought of, but saving souls and urging the careless over the threshold of conversion. For such an object, what pains could be too much? Cowper was made solemnly happy by the conversion of his brother, though grieved by that brother's death; but what, indeed, could have happened better to him or to any man than to be snatched into heaven, in all the freshness and bloom of feeling, at the moment almost when his darkness was turned into light! Newton furnished the energy, the movement, the power, which was necessary to keep the whole in motion. There was a door made in the wall which separated Cowper's house from that of his friend. Into that life of narrow yet lofty aspiration, where perpetual meditation, prayer, and the pernicious researches of self-examination, were enlivened only by those little bits of village gossip which now represented all the outside world to the cultivated mind and tender sportive fancy of a man once used to surroundings so different—Cowper was more and more closely shut up. He became a kind of curate

to his energetic companion, who probably had not the slightest idea of the risk the gentler soul beside him was running. The pot of iron and the pot of porcelain thus swayed along together upon the quickening stream till finally the crash came.

It was in 1771, ten years after his first attack, that the second overwhelmed him. Up to this time his estrangement from all interests but those of the parish and religious life had gradually grown and increased. He who had taken so warm an interest in all passing events, that he "leaped for joy" at the news of "Boscawen's success," and whose "rapture nothing could express when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec," says coldly now—"Whether the nation is worshipping Mr. Wilkes or any other idol is of little moment to one who hopes and believes he shall shortly stand in the presence of the great and blessed God;" he whose power of letter-writing has by many critics been considered almost as remarkable as his poetry, sends a brief spare note, half-a-dozen lines and no more, with long intervals between, to the one only friend, Joseph Hill, who still insisted upon writing to him. He read little, having no books, nor any time to give to them. Now and then he wrote a few hymns for Newton's collection, and obeyed Newton's will, and followed Newton's ways, with a miserable docility. The lurking demon which pursued him was not long in taking advantage of circumstances so congenial. Cowper was in the vicarage when the final outburst came, and such was the obstinacy of the attack, that months elapsed before he could be got to

return to his house, though it was only next door—an extraordinary trial of his friend's affection. We have no particular account of the events of this terrible time. Newton was overwhelmed with sorrow and sympathy—a sympathy which was naturally soon tinctured by a sense of the extraordinary burden thus cast upon him. Mrs. Unwin alone stood by the man who had thrown himself like a child upon her companionship; uttering no word out of the terrible vigil, making no attempt to deliver herself; wearing her life out in attendance upon him, in humouring all his sick fancies, and watching all his troubled ways.

Cowper recovered from this second attack as a child might have recovered from a severe illness, with no rapture of light and joy such as attended his former recovery, but a gentle and languid return to the possibility of existence. He came slowly to life out of doors. The spiritual and intellectual man which had been strained to death dropped from him, and a harmless gentle creature, with the tastes of a child, came out into the silent sunshine instead. He pruned the trees, he fed the fowls, smiling, "for the first time for sixteen months," at some touch of nature among them. When he at last consented to go home, the flickering life grew a little stronger; he became a carpenter, made bird-cages and tables, and built himself a greenhouse, like a boy come home for the holidays. "As long as he is occupied," says Newton, "he is tolerably easy." As the process advanced he tried a little drawing, and, when

he began to approach complete amendment, books. But he was not fully restored (if, indeed, he can ever have been said to be fully restored) until his spiritual director was removed from Olney. It seems almost cruel to the real friendship and affection subsisting between them, to note the new spring which came to Cowper as soon as he was left to himself. Probably he was quite unconscious of it, and the friendship remained as warm as ever; but the fact is certain that Newton was no sooner out of the way than the first break appeared in the sky of the poet. Newton left Olney in the end of 1779, and in May 1780 Cowper sent to his friend Hill, with whom he had resumed correspondence, a copy of the pleasant verses entitled "Report of an Adjudged Case not to be found in any of the Books;" the case of "Nose *versus* eyes." The coincidence is singular, if it is no more; and it is singular, too, to note the innocent unconscious hypocrisy with which he keeps up to Newton the semblance of entire darkness after the invasion of this spark of light. The interposition of "a sportive thought" is, he says, "as if harlequin should intrude himself into the ghastly chamber where a corpse is deposited in state"—a saying which his biographers in general take for a proof of the continuance of his darker mood, but which looks much more like that maintenance of the habitual gloom expected from a sufferer, which is one of the commonest and most excusable traits of humanity. "You think I am merry, and have got over it," we all say when we are surprised by our first laugh; "but if you only knew how my outward appearance

mocks the woe within." Thus Cowper kept on his sables, his melancholy countenance, knowing that these glooms would gain him a certain credit in his friends' eyes which a laugh would dissipate; but, all the same, felt the warm tide of renewed life stealing into his heart.

And now there dawned upon him brighter days—the brightest days in his life. He begins not only to write to his friends, but to send verses to them; now sportive, now moralising, but all disclosing a new tide in his mind. His letters to Newton still display, with a certain half-sad half-amusing persistency, the black mask of woe unutterable in which that friend had been accustomed to see him; but he puts it on to no other of his correspondents. Thus, while he writes to Unwin of his favourite pursuits, it is in cheerfulest tones. "I never received a little pleasure in my life; if I am delighted, it is in the extreme;" but he recurs to the fictitious solemnity habitual to their intercourse when he tells Newton of the very same pleasures, assuring him that when he has paid his greenhouse, his latest toy, "the accustomed visit, and watered it and given it air, I say to myself—'This is not mine, it is a plaything lent me for the present; I must leave it soon.'" The solemnity here is almost ludicrous; he could not have spoken more seriously had "the plaything lent him" been a favourite child. But it becomes amusing to note this entire change of tone according to the correspondent. It is as if Newton and Cowper were compelled to use a different language from that of ordinary men, and kept up their proficiency in it, as they

might have done with a foreign tongue, by practising it between themselves. But in the meantime his bondage to unnatural duties was over, and all about him learned to humour and soothe, no longer to make claims upon, the gentle invalid. How to keep him amused and quietly employed was now the chief problem, not how to make use of him, and turn his gifts and graces to account.

This then was the training which made a poet of Cowper, one of the most popular in England—in his way a transforming influence, a new beginning of intellectual life and power. Had we been left to conjecture what lines of education would have been the best on which to raise up for us the precursor of a new poetical age, certainly these are not the lines which we would have chosen. Nor, had we been asked to prophesy what were the works to be expected from a man so exceptionally circumstanced—with a past so strangely chequered, a future so painfully uncertain, a mind so sensitive, and which had passed through so many passionate struggles—could we have hit upon anything half so unlikely as the actual issue. What we should have looked for would have been some profound and morbid study of a despairing soul, some terrible pictures like those of Job, some confusion of gloomy skies and storms, and convulsions of nature. That anatomy of the heart which he gives us in his various narratives of his own feelings, that minute dissection of quivering nerve and tissue, would have been what we should have looked for in his poetry. But lo, when the moment came, and the prophet was

softly persuaded and guided into the delivery of his burden, it was no such wild exposition of the terrors and pangs of the soul that came to his lips. These heavy vapours melted and dispersed from the infinite sweet blueness of the heavens: he forgot himself as if he had never been—and forgot all those miseries of the imagination, those bitter pangs and sorrows, the despair and darkness through which he had stumbled blindly for years. A soft and genial freedom entered into his soul, involuntary smiles came to him, light to his eyes, and to his steps such wandering careless grace, such devious gentle ways, as no one had dreamed of. The country through which the lazy Ouse meandered was new-discovered by the new poet. It was a torpid, flat, damp midland district; and he a convulsed and sorrow-stricken soul. But ere any one knew the dull fields turned into a fresh and fragrant landscape, a homely sweet epitome of nature, and the man into a new see-er according to the ancient meaning of the word, a spectator full of that happy wonder and surprise as at a new sight never revealed to man before, which is the privilege of genius. Something miraculous is in every such revelation. In Cowper it was doubly so; for this new country which he discovered, like Columbus, was old and familiar, and himself long past all the novelties of life.

His first beginning, however, belonged more to the old generation in which he was born than the new, for which he was to prepare the way. It was at the suggestion of Mrs. Unwin, urgently seeking occupa-

tion for her patient, and tremulously hopeful that making poetry, even better than making bird-cages would draw him out of himself, that he began the composition of something more important than fugitive verses. It seems to have been necessary for Cowper to have a suggestion from some one to impel him into every exertion, and no doubt in that religious circle it was said and thought that great good might be done, and the best of all causes advanced by poetical discussion of the evils abroad in the world and the cure for them. He was disabled from Evangelical work in the personal way, but here was something which he could do. He took up the suggestion with so much relish that his first volume was entirely written in the cold and gloomy winter days, between December and March, probably the time of the year which alarmed his kind nurses most. It was composed of several poems on abstract subjects—the "Progress of Error," "Truth," "Expostulation," "Hope," "Charity," "Retirement," and "Conversation"—with a poetical dialogue called "Table Talk," which was supposed to be the most light and amusing, in the front, to beguile the public into the more serious moralities behind. The poetical importance of these productions was small, and there was no novelty either in the treatment or in the subjects to call for special attention. Had he written no more, he would scarcely have found a place with his biographer Hayley, and would have been far from reaching the elevation of his school-fellows Lloyd or Churchill—both of them dead nearly twenty years before.

"These poems," says a record of the day, "are written by Mr. Cowper of the Inner Temple, who seems to be a man of a sober and religious tone of mind, with a benevolent heart and a serious wish to inculcate the precepts of morality. He is not, however, possessed of any superior abilities, or the power of genius requisite for so arduous an undertaking." Daring though this seems, it was not any such instance of critical temerity as the attempted slaughter, in later times, of Wordsworth or Keats. The reviewer had solid reason for his opinion. Good sense and virtuous feeling, with a somewhat sectarian onslaught upon phases of society, of which the poet knew little or nothing, characterise these efforts. They are like their titles, essays in verse, containing nothing that had not been said before, nothing that gave any promise of the new fountain of poetry which was about to spring in so unlooked-for a spot. It may be curious, however, in a literary history, to give the summary made by this respectable and sober Mr. Cowper of the Inner Temple, of the history of literature—

> "Ages elapsed ere Homer's lamp appeared,
> And ages ere the Mantuan swan was heard,
> To carry nature lengths unknown before,
> To give a Milton birth, ask'd ages more.
> Thus genius rose and set at order'd times,
> And shot a day-spring into distant climes,
> Ennobling ev'ry region that he chose,
> He sunk in Greece, in Italy he rose,
> And tedious years of Gothic darkness pass'd,
> Emerged all splendour in our isle at last.

Thus lovely Halcyons dive into the main,
Then show far off their shining plumes again.

. . . . . .

In front of these came Addison. In him
Humour in holiday and sightly trim,
Sublimity and Attic taste, combined
To polish, furnish, and delight the mind.
Then Pope, as harmony itself exact,
In verse well disciplin'd, complete, compact,
Gave virtue and morality a grace
That, quite eclipsing pleasure's painted face,
Levied a tax of wonder and applause,
Ev'n on the fools that trampled on their laws.
But he (his musical finesse was such,
So nice his ear, so delicate his touch)
Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
And ev'ry warbler has his tune by heart.
Nature imparting her satiric gift,
Her serious mirth, to Arbuthnot and Swift,
With droll sobriety they raised a smile
At folly's cost, themselves unmoved the while.
That constellation set, the world in vain
Must hope to look upon their like again.
A. Are we then left—*B.* Not wholly in the dark,
Wit now and then, struck smartly, shows a spark,
Sufficient to redeem the modern race
From total night and absolute disgrace.
While servile trick and imitative knack
Confine the million in the beaten track,
Perhaps some courser, who disdains the road,
Snuffs up the wind and flings himself abroad.
Contemporaries all surpass'd, see one,
Short his career, indeed, but ably run.
Churchill, himself unconscious of his pow'rs,
In penury consumed his idle hours,
And, like a scatter'd seed at random sown,
Was left to spring by vigour of his own.

Lifted at length by dignity of thought,
And dint of genius to an affluent lot,
He laid his head in luxury's soft lap,
And took too often there his easy nap.
If brighter beams than all he threw not forth,
'Twas negligence in him, not want of worth.
Surly and slovenly and bold and coarse,
Too proud for art, and trusting in mere force,
Spendthrift alike of money and of wit,
Always at speed and never drawing bit,
He struck the lyre in such a careless mood,
And so disdain'd the rules he understood,
The laurel seem'd to wait on his command,
He snatch'd it rudely from the muse's hand."

The reader will perceive that Cowper has no recollection of Shakspeare in the list of "lovely halcyons" reappearing in their shining plumes from the main: but on the other hand, that he has enough of critical discrimination to see the harm that Pope had done to poetry, leaving the "tune" which every warbler could get by heart to check all inspirations. It is a curious symptom, however, of the stagnation in which his mind had lain during his long seclusion, or of the still clinging prejudice of his schoolboy days, that all these twenty years had not modified his opinion of Churchill, or made his lineaments less heroic in the eyes of this other Westminster boy.

To see our poet calmly putting forth this little volume, so commonplace, so didactic, so entirely innocent of any prevision of the stream that was to be opened so soon in the desert, is one of the strangest things in literature. He himself was as little aware of what was coming as anybody else could be. Though

he could complain of the tune that every warbler got by heart, he yet jogged on to its measure in an imperfect rendering, with an almost stolid incapacity to perceive that he too was following the hackneyed method. There was never a more remarkable instance of how little a man may know of himself and his own powers. So far as can be seen, he was not dissatisfied with his production, and it is doubtful whether he ever knew how long a distance there was between these didactic essays and the much greater work that followed. Many passages, however, in them have become the common property of the world. The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the contrast between the woman who "knew, and knew no more, her Bible true," and the "brilliant Frenchman"—with several other passages, have got among the classic commonplaces of quotation; but whether this would have been the case had not their author become also the author of the "Task," it is difficult to tell. And though his first volume made little or no impression at the time, it became afterwards one of those books, perhaps the most widely popular of all books, which a religious community ventures to adopt as at once amusing and edifying. For such an audience, the cottager who was so much better than Voltaire was a matchless picture. She sits before us with her little mob-cap and her pillow, twisting her bobbins in the pretty frontispiece of an old edition: the comparison was one to dazzle and delight a whole community, to whom it was sweet to see Voltaire set down as he deserved, and the simple believer elevated. The same reason added to the

popularity of the "Task." There is no such secret for making literature popular.

At this time, without expectation or warning, a new influence came into Cowper's life. The legend goes that he saw two ladies from his window shopping in the little street of Olney, one of whom was the wife of a neighbouring clergyman; and that he was so much struck by the appearance of the other, that he moved Mrs. Unwin to ask them to tea. Lady Austen "waived ceremony and paid the first visit" in any case. She was "the sister of Mrs. Jones," and the widow of some undistinguished baronet. After the invitation to tea, Cowper took fright, and had to be coaxed and persuaded to enter the room in which the guests were; but on making the venture, plunged at once into that sudden fervour of intimacy to which shy people are liable. He was not a famous poet in those days, but a poor invalid recluse, with a shadow of madness and misery about him, whose story was inevitably known to all his neighbours, and about whom there could be no delusion possible; but though all this is against the theory that a brilliant, lively, charming, and very likely fanciful woman, such as Lady Austen seems to have been, meant to marry him, it is quite enough to explain the compassionate interest rapidly ripening into warm friendship which moved her at first. Men like Cowper are always interesting to women, and there can be little doubt that, in the dull neighbourhood of Olney, such company and conversation as his would be a godsend to any visitor from livelier scenes. When the new alliance

went so far as to induce her to settle in Olney in the adjoining house, with that famous door in the wall first made to facilitate communications between Newton and Cowper, reopened, a stronger motive is no doubt necessary. But it is a vulgar conclusion that marriage must be thought of wherever a man and woman are concerned, and it was the age for romantic friendships. At all events, whatever was the cause, Lady Austen took up her abode in the deserted vicarage. In less than three months their intimacy had sprung to such a height, that they were Anna, Mary, and William to each other—with still fonder additions : *my* Anna and *her* William were, however, epithets which the taste of the time, as well as the affectionateness of the religious circle permitted, and Cowper was precisely the kind of man with whom such relationships are practicable. He was affectionate without a touch of passion. He was utterly disabled by the misfortunes of his life from any independent personal action ; he was poor and dependent upon his friends ; he was fifty. The mere notion of a man so circumstanced calling forth the idea of marriage at all seems inconceivable. Strange must have been the humility, wonderful the self-sacrifice of the woman who could entertain such a thought ; and the gay high-spirited capricious woman who is supposed to be the second who formed designs upon the valetudinarian, shows no symptom of being either humble or self-devoted. She liked, no doubt, to have a man of unusual gifts under her influence, and was flattered by her own evident power to turn him hither and thither as she would : but that she

would have made the sacrifice of her life to him, is a suggestion of which there is not the slightest evidence, and one which all the facts of the case go to disprove.

However, it is vain to attempt to throw light upon a story which has often been discussed without any conclusion, and of which we shall never know the *fin mot*, if *fin mot* there was. What is certain is that the society of this lady had the most remarkable effect upon the as yet undeveloped poet of fifty. He who had written respectable platitudes with perfect satisfaction to himself yesterday, burst forth all at once into poetry, genuine, original, and often great, emancipating his age as well as himself from all servile bonds. Moral essays of the most respectable and unexceptionable kind one year, in conformity with all the canons, yet getting from the public nothing better than a respectful yawn; and in the next the "Task," with all its indifference to law and rule, its freedom and discursiveness, its unvarnished nature and truth. That the transition from Mrs. Unwin as muse to Lady Austen could have made all this difference is as wonderful as anything else in the tale. But so it would seem to have been. His Anna touched the right chord in the heart of this middle-aged man of genius. She told him the story of John Gilpin, and he, lying awake half the night laughing over it, produced next day the ballad which carries John Gilpin to posterity. She spoke to him of the Royal George, and the bell which he set tolling for the brave still sounds in all the echoes. She gave him a task, telling

him that he could write on any subject, even on her sofa, and lo, the greatest poem of his generation came into being. The impulse is too distinct to be mistaken. He was a man who never did anything of his own initiative: but he who wrote "Table Talk" at Mrs. Unwin's suggestion, and was pleased with his work, does not seem the same man as he who wrote the "Task" at Lady Austen's. We can only wonder at the extraordinary difference; we cannot explain it.

Here then, after all this long preface, we have arrived at the moment when the latent forces which had been lying unknown all these years burst forth, unthought of and unsuspected; and the recluse by his chimney corner, where he wound silks for "the fair," and read the newspaper to them, and hugged himself in the snugness of domestic bliss, became the reformer of literature and the father of a new poetic age. The transition is so wonderful that it is beyond the comprehension of the spectator. He who had jogged so pleasantly in the old yoke for one stage, cast bit and bridle entirely from him in the next, renounced his old high and dry moral subjects, his classical allusions, his balanced couplets, and set out unfettered, as if he had been a new creature, upon that new yet old familiar way. We see no preparation, no gradual stirring up of poetical enthusiasm, only a little pleasant banter which made the social evening pass all the more brightly. Probably Lady Austen, who loved brightness and life, did not take any great pleasure in "Table Talk" or the "Progress of Error." Why should not he

try blank verse? the charmed and flattered poet was very willing to do anything to please her. And thus all at once he passed from the conventional to the real —to a genuine land of inspiration. That his poetical faith had not changed, and that he had not received any new light from contemporary events, is evident from the verses we have quoted, in which Churchill still holds the palm, as he had done in Cowper's mind twenty years before. He had not been brought to love better things by anything that had happened since then. Indeed nothing had happened—a few ingenious gentlemen had published poems, the names of which alone may be found in the records, but which the world has long since forgotten. Goldsmith indeed, who was Cowper's contemporary, had published since Churchill's time his "Deserted Village," which, if not so famous as his immortal Vicar, was still worthy of a higher place than Churchill; but Cowper, it is evident, was of the other faction in literature, disliked Johnson, and took no pleasure in Goldsmith. Thomson, indeed, might have lent real aid in opening his eyes to nature, but Thomson himself was not free of classic bondage: and Cowper had neither teachers or models in his generation. But being told to take up an old system and a forgotten measure, he did so, and made in it the triumph of his life.

To compare the "Task" with any of the other poems of the age would be too long a process. Nature had not been banished from literature; but she appeared there trim and dressed, her fields and her hedgerows, her halls and cottages, all in neat and

orderly lines, with here a rustic Chloe, and there a languishing Strephon, not to speak of the Naiads and the wood-nymphs, and soft Ausonian breezes, and Eolus, and Boreas, and all their crew. But when Cowper stepped forth into the rural landscape, the whole of these attendant figures were scattered to the winds. He paused in all due faithfulness to do his best, and "sing the Sofa," for "the Fair commands the song;" but scarcely has he put that piece of furniture together, when he steps abroad into the soft yet brisk air outside, where there is no classical torpor, or any of those "halcyons" which he had himself celebrated, but "a ruffling wind" blowing in his face as he stands on the top of the low hill, and sees with a pleasure never exhausted

> "Ouse slow-winding through a level plain
> Of spacious meads, with cattle sprinkled o'er."

Nothing could be more lawless, less regular. Even Mr. Benham, and Mr. Goldwin Smith, his last biographers, are compelled to remark that the reflections, as a rule, are not "naturally suggested by the preceding passage." "From the use of a sofa by the gouty to those who, being free from the gout, do not need sofas, and so to country walks and country life, is hardly a natural transition." One of the great points in the work, indeed, is that we are made at once entirely independent of natural transition. When he leaves the sofa, and steps suddenly outside, all inconsequent and out of rule, the reader is ready to applaud out of sheer satisfaction and relief. What

should detain the poet, that soft yet cordial morning, not too still, with "a ruffling wind" about, and "the distant plough slow-moving in the fields"? He stands and gazes, and we with him, till the wind rising "sweeps the skirts of some far-spreading wood," and the branches wave in the blast, and the sound of waters breaks into and completes the cadences of nature. At a touch this wide and fresh landscape, where "the sloping land recedes into the clouds," and where the winds sweep so far and free, and the rills chime upon their pebbles, has enlarged the world itself and all that is therein. The rigid old pictures are like a child's sketches, all in hard lines, with no gradations of surface; but here we have at once the true artist, whose colours melt into each other, and under whose hands the depths of air and wonders of the half-seen distance come upon the canvas one cannot tell how. Perhaps it is above all this atmosphere, new to verse, which is the special charm of Cowper's landscapes; the crisp air blows about us as we read, carrying out of the depths a hundred sounds—bells from the distant towers, the voice of waters, the rhythmic rustle of the trees, and those far-off occasional notes of keener meaning, which betray a human population scattered around; or, with a still more delicate touch, the wintry landscape, frozen and still, breathes about us—

> "No noise is here, or none that hinders thought;
> The redbreast warbles still, but is content
> With slender notes, and more than half suppress'd,
> Pleased with his solitude, and flitting light,

> From spray to spray; where'er he rests, he shakes
> From many a twig the pendant drops of ice
> That twinkle in the withered leaves below."

In every season he has no conventional picture before him, but the scene itself in all its truth and reality, revealed by the companionship of years. None of its changing moods is lost upon him. He sees the cattle how they stand about in the torpor of the cold, and the sheep how they scatter upon the spring pastures, and the horse

> "That skims the spacious meadow at full speed,
> Then stops, and snorts, and, throwing high his heels,
> Starts to the voluntary race again,"

in the rapture of the genial season. Nothing so daring in adherence to fact, nothing so free from all consideration of what is, or is not, permitted by poetical canons, had ever been put into verse before. After all the freedom of the following age, and the flood of realism which has swept away so many barriers, we still wonder and even smile at Cowper's boldness. How he could have ventured in this first step out of the bondage of the schools to "the stercoraceous heap" which fumes at full length in his pages, it is impossible to tell. Had he been a rebel born, long plotting the emancipation of his art, he could not have gone farther, and no one since, so far as we are aware, has ever gone so far. Perhaps as a literary pioneer, the fugleman of the coming army, it was well that his audacity should be beyond example as well as beyond imitation. But it is more difficult to trace the process in his gentle individuality, which

made this boldness practicable. Possibly his very seclusion, the narrowness of his immediate audience, the certainty that none of his wanderings, either in prose or verse, would be without interest to them, gave him the necessary boldness. He followed the course of his own musings, of his own daily routine, wayward yet regular, with no immediate contemplation of the public, with only a pleased consciousness of the half amusement, half horror, of the parlour—Mrs. Unwin, suspending her needles in consternation as the cucumber-bed came into full view, while the livelier Anna put down her embroidery and clapped her hands at her poet's daring. They would laugh over it, no doubt, as they sipped their tea, and anticipate with many a gentle jest the confusion of the critics, and persuade poor Mary, half bewildered, to laugh too. And with what delightful enthusiasm the two women would receive the picture of that domestic blessedness which they themselves had made, and look round upon the originals of the picture, the close-drawn curtains, the sofa warm in the firelight, the urn upon the table: and feel the very needle working "patiently into the snowy lawn," to be made immortal. And so it has been. The fashion of that blessedness has almost passed away, at least from the imagination, of England; but those who practically love it least cannot refuse to be moved by the warmth and repose and tender grace of that immortal parlour. Not Adam and Eve in their paradise, not Alexander, throned and triumphant, with lovely Thais beside him, has kept a more permanent place

in the world's picture gallery. It is not a lofty kind of bliss perhaps, but nothing could be more perfect within its limits. And the delightful union and warmth is enhanced by the consciousness that the three people who form this happy circle are all solitaries in the social economy, not fixed by right in this happy routine, but giving each to each in voluntary kindness and the delicate affinity of friendship those elements of happiness which make their shelter so complete an emblem of the home. Had it been a home of the ordinary type, it would not have suited the uses of the poet so well. But his skill and instinct entirely blind us to the fact that this picture, at once so ideal and so real, is by its constitution entirely removed from the orthodox household. In all likelihood it never occurred to himself that it was so.

Everybody knows this picture. It is the one characteristic scene by which, more than anything else, the poet is enshrined in popular opinion. And there is no doubt that his own generation was more grateful to him for this sublimation of their common life, and glorification of the fireside, than for all he did beside. It opened to him a thousand hearts in that great unknown mass which says little for itself, and is no adept in criticism; but which, when once it loves a book, carries it clear of all comment into a fame which is beyond discussion and above praise. How different it was from that scene in which Belinda's petticoat occupies so much space! as different as are the tiresome belle and beau with all their

fripperies from the wholesome intercourse of actual life. The one, like the other, is an interior; in the one, as in the other, "the fair" is the sovereign of the domain. The very words of the Popish era still lingered on Cowper's tongue. But the whole atmosphere and every suggestion had been transformed. The "Rape of the Lock" was an innocent rape enough, but the inspiring fancy of the scene is, without intention, fundamentally impure. The encroachments of the gallant, and the half-fictitious resistance and simulated rage of the lady belong to a series of adventures older and more persistently followed than anything else in literature. That there is no harm in them is a mere accident. But Cowper changed altogether the spirit of the meeting and the meeting-place. No hot pursuit or amorous conflict, but a sweet and sober union of minds and hearts, a calm of perfect satisfaction, a mutual understanding, harmony and dependence, each upon each, are in his pages. Hazardous encounters there had been plenty; even in Richardson's virtuous novels assaults upon what is called female virtue were the invariable theme, and every woman's mind was concentrated upon the determination to save her honour. But with a touch the fastidious gentle poet, fastidious in taste, pure in nature, religious in heart, made an end of all this. The honourable placid house in which men and women stood together in mutual support and sympathy and tenderness, without a suggestion of evil, was created by his hand—or say, rather, disclosed, for he was no creator. In all ages the bulk of man-

kind thus lives, without any fermentation of passion or illicit fancy. In the worst of times, vice is the exception. If it is rampant in high places, it is hated below. If youth is noisy and uncontrolled, the very ordinance of nature which turns men and women into fathers and mothers, teaches them that only by means of social virtue is life possible. But up to this time no one had ventured to make the fireside heroic, or set it in the front of all that is happy and beautiful. To almost all the women and a great number of the men of his age, this one achievement was enough to earn him everlasting gratitude. Cowper became the poet of the domestic circle, the apostle of the home. Even to those who did not receive with any relish the religious meditations into which his verse so easily flowed, this poetical adoption of the centre of domestic peace was almost a personal happiness.

We have said that Cowper was no creator; but when we turn to the bold and well-defined figures that cross his landscape, set down without a single wavering line or artificial grace, the force of portraiture almost reaches the height of creation. No pretty ideal figures, no Damon and Musidora, no gay Lothario or lovely Lavinia, are there. Never was a more distinct and real person than the woodman going out to his work in the morning across the snowy fields. They are all so well known that we hesitate to quote; but this picture is one which, though so simply real, can never be looked upon without a keen imaginative pleasure—

"Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcerned
The cheerful haunts of man, to wield the axe
And drive the wedge, in yonder forest drear,
From morn to eve his solitary task.
Shaggy and lean and shrewd, with pointed ears
And tail cropped short, half lurcher and half cur,
His dog attends him. Close behind his heel
Now creeps he slow, and now with many a frisk,
Wide-scamp'ring, snatches up the drifted snow
With iv'ry teeth, or ploughs it with his snout;
Then shakes his powder'd coat, and barks for joy.
Heedless of all his pranks, the sturdy churl
Moves right toward the mark; nor stops for aught,
But now and then, with pressure of his thumb,
T' adjust the fragrant charge of a short tube,
That fumes beneath his nose; the trailing cloud
Streams far behind him, scenting all the air."

We repeat that scarcely any poet since, even Wordsworth in the height of his polemical determination to employ common words and images instead of those appropriated to the use of poetry—has put so bold a sketch upon paper: and yet it is so entirely appropriate and true, that not a word but of applause can be said. Here is no wilful descent from the worthy to the mean, as in the case of Betty Foy and Peter Bell. The poet is as completely devoid of the affectation of a revolutionary as it is possible to imagine. His woodman crosses the wintry landscape, because in the first place he did so, an excellent reason, yet not all-sufficient in art; and secondly because he is the very soul of the bare and wintry season, he, and his dog, and his pipe—setting out to his work in sturdy rural indifference, consoling himself with such

warmth as is possible, the one workman whom the snow does not stop, whose axe supplies one of the few familiar welcome sounds that break the spell of the silence. The picture in all its glistening whiteness, the sharp keen pleasure of the new fallen snow, which goes to the hearts of dogs and children, the man's stolid straightforward course, satisfy our mind with a perfection of composition which yet is pure and simple nature. A little while before, Cowper himself would have put a moral lesson instead of this living group; and Thomson, shivering, would have painted us an ideal incident—but poetry had now found its eyes, and its completest simple inspiration.

And who does not remember the companion picture? The poet does not see it with actual eyesight—but warm and cheerful indoors, with the firelight brightening the winter gloaming, hears "the twanging horn on yonder bridge," and beholds the messenger in his mind's eye—as we, too, do, with a sense of elation and expectation borrowed from him, though the news that come to us every hour or so have worn out, so far as our minds are concerned, that warm alert attention and sense of pleasure.

> "He comes, the herald of a noisy world,
> With spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks,
> News from all nations lumbering at his back,
> Yet careless what he brings, his one concern
> Is to conduct it to the destined inn,
> And having dropped th' expect'd bag, pass on—
> He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch!

Cold and yet cheerful ; messenger of grief
Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some,
To him indifferent whether grief or joy ;
Houses in ashes, and the fall of stocks,
Births, deaths, and marriages, epistles wet
With tears that trickled down the writer's cheek
Fast as the periods from his fluent quill ;
Or charged with amorous sigh of absent swains,
Or nymph responsive, equally effect
His horse and him, unconscious of them all."

This is one of the sights which has been entirely swept away from our experience. None of us remember that functionary as the bearer of Her Majesty's mails—but yet how true, how easy, how full of the very spirit of the night is this representation of the wayfarer, whom we hear passing from behind Cowper's curtains. In spite of ourselves we feel the thrill of gentle excitement and eagerness. Though we are deluged with newspapers, and have so many posts a day, yet we understand it all better than the things we have seen with our own eyes ; the moon reflected in the wintry flood, the dim lamps at the end of the wearisome long bridge, the little town half asleep in the slumbrous cold, but rousing with quickened pulses at the clattering hoofs and cheerful horn—and at his window the spectator, glancing out in a warm dim glow of firelight, and the little circle all expectant of the evening's reading, the imprisoned wranglers that are to be set free, and all the tumult of great London that is about to echo in the quiet, and make it still more warm, more soft and sweet.

This delightful picture, however, recalls to us the great defect in Cowper's poetry, though no doubt it was one of the qualities which gained it instant acceptance with the crowd. It is that he cannot enjoy this happy seclusion of his, nor picture forth the domestic perfection of his life without a comparison, very much to the disadvantage of all the rest of the world, who are not so happy as he. While he and those kind companions whose chief thought is how to make him happiest, "welcome peaceful evening in" in their manner, he cannot help making an invidious comparison—

> "Not such his evening, who with shining face
> Sweats in the crowded theatre, and squeezed,
> And bored with elbow points, through both his sides
> Outscolds the ranting actor on the stage;
> Nor his who patient stands till his feet throb,
> And his head thumps to feed upon the breath
> Of patriots bursting with heroic rage,
> Or placemen all tranquillity and smiles."

This runs all through his great work. He can never describe his own good fortune without joining to the picture its inevitable contrast; as if it were a moral advantage to spend one's life in gentle idleness, and like the lilies of the field, neither to toil nor spin. He has no perception that his fireside, so sweet, so tranquil, so placid, is not the first and finest of the scenes of human life. "I crown thee king of intimate delights," he cries, addressing winter—

> "Fireside enjoyments, homeborn happiness,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof

Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
Of long uninterrupted evening know."

And then his complacency bursts forth once more.

"No rattling wheels stop short before these gates,
No powdered pert proficient in the art
Of sounding an alarm, assaults these doors
Till the street rings."

He cannot be content with being exceptionally blessed himself; he must point his happiness with the reflection that the greater part of the world is less happy than he; and in doing this, every amusement passes under his lash; the theatre especially he returns to again and again, to point out its inferiority—and all the frivolous congregations of men.

This, however, though a great drawback in point of art, and not a small one in charity, was quite in accordance with the spirit of the religious revival which then reigned with passionate force in England over a large proportion of those classes to which Cowper's poetry appealed. Something of a natural revulsion from the artificial pre-eminence of "society," and that atmosphere, which, from the days of the *Spectator* to those of the "Rape of the Lock," had infected literature, setting up the pettiest subjects, and supposing a universal interest in ruffles and powder, which no wholesome nation ever was really possessed by—was no doubt in the theory that "God made the country, but man made the town," which is the oft-repeated principle of the poet's philosophy. But stronger than this and more earnest

was that long-standing religious objection to all the paths of pleasure (so called), an objection much older than Wesley, which never fails to accompany every great religious movement. No theory ever is so persistent, so profoundly rooted in human nature, as to form part of movements differing in every other respect, without having a foundation of truth and justice which is unassailable. The evils which result from social excitement and pursuit of pleasure, the vices that creep in, the feverish appetite, which grows by what it feeds on, for more and more highly spiced diversion, the extravagance in mind, in fashion, and in purse, into which, almost always, the tide of pleasure betrays those who are carried away by it, are patent enough to all beholders. And since the day when St. Paul warned his converts against "fleshly lusts that war against the soul," there has never been a revival of earnest religious feeling without this crusade against amusements, innocent enough perhaps in themselves, yet a possible fount of evil. The prejudice of the Methodists and Evangelicals was not more strong than that of their predecessors in every reformation; but it is nearer to ourselves and more easily perceptible. In the case of such a poet as Cowper, it has a tinge of something ungenerous in it which rouses our prejudices in their turn. He who was so severe upon all the pleasures of worldly life was a man incapable of any share in them—"a stricken deer" who had left the herd, a being unfit in body and still more in mind for the enjoyments he decried. His domestic blessedness was not arrived at by a

series of sacrifices and renunciations of more brilliant happiness, but was what he liked best, the only kind of pleasure of which he was really capable. And on the other hand, the gentle audience which he addressed, which was neither the highest nor the lowest, but the mass between, the great middle of society, upon the vast level of which there are neither the brilliant lights nor the tragic darkness which affect the extremes of life, was like himself out of the way of the tide of fashion and social excitement. It was and always must be to the bulk of any people, rather a pleasure than a pain to be assured that high life is full of wretchedness and danger, and pleasure in all its manifestations a road to ruin. This gives a disagreeable aspect always to the fulminations of a pious recluse, and all the widespread and oft-repeated strictures of the retired and humble upon the gay and great. They are damning sins they have no mind to, they are dignifying their own mild and moderate possibilities with an air of noble virtue and superiority to meaner motive. But in those days people were not sufficiently at leisure to remark this. Only a generation before, Hogarth had painted those terrible discourses on canvas, which made the results of a "gay" life apparent to the dullest eyes—and Richardson and Fielding had revealed such an imbroglio of vices under the calm of ordinary life as might well have affrighted the reader. Thus Cowper's theology was scarcely to blame for the tone he took; but yet his theology gave it a deeper meaning, and pointed the shaft

which all the moralists had already sharpened. To us it is the drawback, the attendant bitter to so much sweetness; to a great part of his audience, no doubt, it was the chief interest and value of his work.

But while the "Task" was in the course of writing, alas, there came into that safe, most sheltered corner, where no crevice seemed to exist through which any serpent could crawl, some of those petty miseries of which society in its turn accuses retirement and domestic life. How it was no one knows. The vulgar mind concludes easily that Lady Austen would have married the poet, and that Mrs. Unwin was jealous. Cowper himself writes a few somewhat spiteful and petty letters on the subject, putting his kind visitor, his gay and sweet companion, vaguely in the wrong; and Hayley, his biographer, with that injurious "hushing up" which conveys a worse impression than any explanations, attributes the break to "a trifling feminine discord." But the only thing certain about it, is that we shall never know what it was. There had been a coolness shortly after the beginning of their alliance, which was got over; but the second breach was final; before even the book which she had inspired was finished, Lady Austen departed. Cowper's explanation of it to Lady Hesketh, who did not know her, was that the habit of "paying my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven," interrupted his work. "I was forced to neglect the 'Task' to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the sub-

ject," he says, with an ungenerous and petty tone in his self-defence. "But she had ill-health, and before I had quite finished the work, was obliged to repair to Bristol." The friendship had lasted altogether about three years. Some soreness, it is evident, there was about the breach, which prompts Cowper's lengthy letters on the subject; but that is all we know. These letters ended with a forlorn boast, that "the cause of so many interruptions" being removed, "we have seldom any company at all." Newton had been very doubtful as to that pleasant addition to their life, and the "interruptions" which threatened to give Cowper a brighter surrounding, and he was no doubt pleased that the lively woman, who knew the world and had kept up her relations with it, was gone.

But it is not too much to say that all that was best in Cowper's life went with her. His work kept him up as long as it was in hand; but the last shadows soon began to creep up from the autumnal fields. Out of the sudden light which had fallen upon his life, he went back into the old monotony with a subdued, half fretful, half proud submission. His letters, especially to Newton, grow more and more melancholy. It is true that they had always been of a dejected tone, and that he had scarcely ever ceased to represent himself to the former director of his spiritual life, as a despairing sinner shut out from God's grace; but it is difficult to believe in the despair of the man who spent so many cheerful days by Lady Austen's side, who stuck in the

mud with his Mary, and wrote John Gilpin after a night sleepless with laughter. Fortunately the blank left by Lady Austen's disappearance did not long continue. His cousin, Lady Hesketh, his correspondence with whom had been dropped for years, one day wrote to him, moved by some sudden impulse of kindness, and, with the eagerness of a man who was longing for friendship and society, he flung himself upon her. With all his tender-heartedness, Cowper was a man to whom one devoted ministrant was just about as good as another, and it is evident that his need of some one to vary the routine of existence was greater than it had ever been. "We are all growing young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more are actually returning," he cried in his pleasure. And Lady Hesketh did not confine herself to letter-writing; she offered help, if his circumstances required, and he accepted the offer with a frankness and simplicity, which no doubt made the matter easier at once to her and to himself, but which startles the reader, who perhaps has forgotten that all this time the poet has been dependent upon his family, receiving almost all his living from the benevolence of his relations. Lady Hesketh brought him into renewed intercourse with several members of his family, and his life seemed once more to brighten. He wrote the poem called "Tirocinium," in order to make out the volume, which the "Task" by itself was too short to fill, and a few days after began his translation of Homer;

which showed that his mind was in full activity, and that neither he nor his friends had forgotten the importance to his well-being of constant occupation.

These two facts, however, which one would have thought would have rejoiced all interested in him—his re-union with his relations, and his voluntary commencement of an important piece of work—seem to have alarmed and provoked the interference of Newton, who could not, it appears, consent to give up his supreme spiritual authority over his former penitent. No doubt Lady Austen had shaken it, but she had happily disappeared; and the incoming of a more permanent and legitimate influence gave to the jealous priest—for the character is one, be it Jesuit or Evangelical—a deeper alarm. It was thought that Homer, a pagan, was "greatly below the attention" of a Christian poet, and not a becoming occupation for him; and also that the society of his carnally-minded relations would do him harm. Cowper, however, is not so humble but that he takes up arms for himself at this interference. He cannot amuse himself now, he says, as he once could with carpenters' or gardeners' tools, squirrels, or guinea-pigs. A man's mind has been restored to him, and it must be occupied accordingly. Neither has he any connections of a kind to injure his spiritual life. So unwarrantable a pretension does not make the gentle poet angry, but still he has enough of spirit to repel it. A still more unwarrantable interference was attempted a little later when Lady Hesketh, in her turn, fixed her residence temporarily at Olney, in order

to be near the lonely pair. She was one of Cowper's nearest relations, warranted by family ties and superior fortune to look after him, without fear of any misinterpretation of her conduct; and she soon perceived that the "cruel solitude" of the little town was weighing heavily upon him. Accordingly she lost no time in renting for him a house in the neighbouring village of Weston, from which immediate access could be obtained to the Throckmorton grounds, which were his delight. Cowper's exultation over this new dwelling-place, its "genteel" aspect, its roominess and airiness, and manifold attractions, is like the boundless satisfaction of a child; and his letters to Newton on this subject are written with a certain deprecatory fulness, as if to disarm reproof.

But these simple wiles were unavailing. Some weeks after Newton let loose his thunderbolt; this time it was addressed to Mrs. Unwin, and it seems to have plunged them both into trouble. "The purport of it," Cowper says, "is a direct accusation of me and of her, an accusation implied that we have both diverged into forbidden paths, and led a life unbecoming the Gospel—that many of my friends in London are grieved, and the simple people of Olney astonished; that *he never so much doubted my restoration to Christian privileges*, as now that I converse too much with people of the world, and find too much pleasure in doing so." There could not be a more painful evidence that the most religious of men can be as brutal as the lowest, than this fiery arrow of Newton's "doubt" as to "the restoration of Christian privi-

leges;" a delusion in the poet's mind which he had combated with all his might for years, which he knew had its origin in insanity, yet which in this moment of passion he suddenly adopts and sanctions, uncareful of the misery which it might produce. And this outburst was founded solely on the fact that the poor recluse had got to be on friendly terms with the Throckmortons, and that Lady Hesketh frequently drove him and his companion out! The poet condescends to go over all this ground again in another letter to his angry Pope, which is full of explanation and proof that he does not deserve the chastisement he has received. But even now he does not assert his freedom of action, or do more than defend his "consistency" against the impertinent and cruel attack. This is enough to show, however, how little safe his delicate nature and distempered soul were in the hands of a friend so masterful and remorseless.

Newton, however, was right in one point, that the translation of Homer was not the best work that Cowper could have taken up. But he was a man absolutely dependent upon others for suggestions and starting-points, and was incapable himself of striking out his further path. It is almost ludicrous to see the little stir about him of all his friends, the nurses, servants, and worshippers of the helpless poet, all tremblingly desirous of finding him something to do, and straining after a new subject, while he stands by in amiable weakness, and approves the anxious suggestions, but without any motive to set to work at them, such as Lady Austen had furnished. Lady Hesketh

suggested the Mediterranean, about as strange a theme as could have been thought of. A curate in the neighbourhood thought that the Four Ages had never been adequately treated. This discussion convinces us that we are still in the eighteenth century, in the period when an abstract subject was the natural foundation of a poetical essay. But Cowper, though he listened to them all with so much docility, perhaps knew that poetical essays were not so much worth the doing now-a-days, and that he had said the most of his say in this world. Homer was good steady work, and the "mechanic exercise" of the verse was soothing to him. He got wholesome occupation, and he got a thousand pounds out of this huge task, so much bigger yet less great than the other task which had been concerned with subjects more homely than gods and heroes. It is not a work that counts for much in the story of his career. It is astonishing how like in sound and cadence a bit of this oldest and greatest of epics sounds to the "Winter Evening," or the "Walk at Noon," as we read it, though these poems are certainly not very like Homer. It was when he had completed this that the new subject was so much discussed and looked for; but by that time no new subject charmed him. He had fallen again into the deepest depths, and Mrs. Unwin had been struck by his side with the first touch of paralysis, that most solemn of warnings. Nothing could be more dismal than the condition of the faithful pair in this stage. She grew exigent and selfish (as they say) who had been all devotion, demanding perpetual attention

from him, and babbling in half intelligible words and frequent anger, when he was otherwise occupied; and he strained every nerve to be of use to the invalid who had so often nursed him. There could be no severer lesson upon the inexpediency of such alliances than the way in which kind Lady Hesketh speaks of Mrs. Unwin at this melancholy stage of existence. The poor old lady has no right to be there among all those cousins, and though they are kind to her, yet she is out of place and bores them. The story is dipped in the very darkest hues of domestic tragedy. "Here is a muse of seventy that I perfectly idolise," says Hayley, who in these days was half as good a poet as Cowper, and very well known through the length and breadth of the land; but Lady Hesketh speaks of her as "Madame," and can scarcely restrain her weariness of the feeble and suffering old woman. And thus the last days went mournfully on.

It was, however, in the last glimmering of evening light before his life sank altogether in the darkness, that Cowper wrote two of his finest productions—two of the most exquisite poems in the language—every line of which is instinct with a profound and chastened feeling to which it would be difficult to find a parallel. These are the lines "Addressed to my Mother's Picture," and those entitled "My Mary." Poetry has never produced any utterances more tender and true. They are without passion, for passion does not belong to filial love; and there is not a phrase in them, not a word which could jar upon the most susceptible ear,

not a touch that is extravagant or excessive. This was the one love he knew. Other affections had skimmed over him, calling forth here and there a "swallow-flight" of song: this one love alone was fully possible to him, the love half reverential, half protecting, without fear or doubt, or a possibility of delusion in it which a son bears to his mother. The fact that he who gave forth these supreme utterances of filial affection was himself old when he produced them, brings into the relationship a tender quality which is marvellously touching. The two women whom he thus celebrates are at once greater and more lowly than he, his saints, his servants, his companions. Gratitude—in the one case visionary, in the other how real—a sense of dependence, a sense of tender superiority, mingle and blend as poetry never blended them before. Poor Mr. Hayley, Cowper's "brother-poet," with just as genuine feeling, celebrated his mother, who had preserved his life by her miraculous care from an illness which threatened mind and body.

> "'Twas thine with constant love, through lingering years,
> To bathe thy infant orphan in thy tears,"

says this excellent man though indifferent poet. But Cowper, though his head was all confused and astray among the gathering glooms, and his heart quivering with a thousand arrows, never errs. Any of his true lovers who was asked to supply an example of the poet at perfection, would reply with one of these two poems. They are the expression of the master-feeling of his life.

The last years of all are too sad to dwell upon. Mrs. Unwin would seem to have dropped into that imbecility of weakness which is the most tragic and humiliating conclusion to which this sad humanity is subject: while he, fallen into the very depths of visionary anguish, sat "still and silent as death," speaking to no one, asking nothing, dwelling in a gloomy world of his own, from which in heaven or earth there seemed no outlet. When his Mary died he made no sign of feeling, being lost in the stupor of his own gathering malady. He sat silent with wild sad eyes in the Norfolk parsonage, to which he had been removed, and had novels read to him the livelong day (Evelina for one), finding in them, heaven knows what pitiful solace for woes that were never to be cured in this world. Sometimes the moaning of the sea would soothe him; sometimes he would rouse up to make a mechanical correction of his Homer; sometimes even he would write a cold and gloomy letter—for one of his delusions was that he had ceased to be capable of affection for any one—to his cousin. All that tender care and affection could do for him was done. He survived his faithful companion more than three years, but they were years of darkness, without hope or consolation. A year before his death an incident in a book he was reading, *Anson's Voyages*, caught his troubled fancy, and he wrote the last of all his poems, and the saddest. Pacing up and down in the failing light of the evening, the picture of the drowning sailor, "such a destined wretch as I," grows before him.

"He long survives, who lives an hour
In ocean, self-upheld:
And so long he, with unspent power,
His destiny repelled:
And ever, as the minutes flew,
Entreated help, or cried—'Adieu!'

"At length, his transient respite past,
His comrades, who before
Had heard his voice in every blast,
Could catch the sound no more:
For then, by toil subdued, he drank
The stifling wave, and then he sank.

"No poet wept him; but the page
Of narrative sincere,
That tells his name, his worth, his age,
Is wet with Anson's tear:
And tears by bards or heroes shed
Alike immortalise the dead.

"I therefore purpose not, or dream,
Descanting on his fate,
To give the melancholy theme
A more enduring date:
But misery still delights to trace
Its semblance in another's case.

"No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatched from all effectual aid,
We perished, each alone:
But I, beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulphs than he."

This is the last sound that comes to us out of the darkness in which Cowper was fast disappearing.

Never had a harmless life so miserable an ending. He went down in those deep waters without even that gleam of light at the last, which so often gives pathetic gladness to an ending life. Unconsoled, he was swallowed up by those billows. The last words he said were, when he was offered a cordial, "What can it signify?" What, indeed, did it matter, an hour of weakness, more or less, a pain the greater? By that time the gloom had reached its blackest, the light was near. What did it signify? Who can doubt that all the ceaseless sufferings of his life, all his miseries, some hours thereafter, had become as dreams to him in the great and new revelation that awaited him at the gates of heaven.

His life had been a harmless life; but yet it had been full of trouble to himself, and all who were concerned in it, as unsatisfactory a human existence as ever was. But what he failed altogether to accomplish for himself he did for literature. He had not force enough to break any bonds of his own; on the contrary, his hapless feet were always getting entangled in new ones, and at the very last, after his partial escape from the potent sway of such a man as Newton, he made a poor little dictator for himself out of a pompous village pedagogue, to whom he laid bare all the tortures of his heart. But while he was bound in spirit he was free in his genius, as no man else in his generation was free. Academical rule and precedent had no sway over him; he went out of the schools of the poets a gentle rebel, casting all their leading strings to the winds, not saying a word of

revolt, but with a quiet obstinacy taking his own way. He would not be bound even to logic or sequence, but waved all those limitations lightly from him, and did as Fancy bade, with no defiance, but only a gentle natural waywardness. He saw, with eyes as clear as truth itself, what was before him in the soft fresh outside world, in which there was no intoxicating loveliness but only a modest English landscape; and taste and inclination at once refused to bring in any foreign images, finding that enough, and the genuine humanity that peopled it. He was bold to say what was in him, and to say it his own way; he had the courage to step back in the course of time, and bring his model from higher sources than those of the Augustan age. He broke the spell of Pope, and opened the way to Wordsworth and all the singers that were being born, while he languished and agonised. The world would have been a different world for them if Cowper had not been.

WILLIAM COWPER, Born 1731; Died 1800.

Published	Table Talk Truths .	1782.
„	Progress of Error, etc.	
„	The Task . . .	1784.
„	Tirocinium . . .	
„	Translation of Homer	1791.

CHAPTER II.

ROBERT BURNS.

WHILE Cowper was wasting his early manhood in London doing nothing, and knowing nothing either of the misery or the importance of his future life, a child was born in a clay hut among the Ayrshire wilds, in that far-distant and unknown realm of Scotland, which, though united to England by the closest bonds, was yet almost as little known to Englishmen as any foreign country. It is very difficult to realise to ourselves, indeed, what that country was before Burns and before Scott. No country in the world has owed so much to literature; and we doubt if all the enterprise and spirit of the race could ever have produced the prosperity and wealth which is now its portion, without the stimulating touch of that revelation which made Scotland enchanted ground to all Europe, and has made her sons proud, wherever they have gone, to claim her name. No two men in the world were ever more unlike than the English gentleman, gently bred and well connected, but indolent, timid, and helpless, and the impassioned peasant, full of strong desires and impulses, rash, headstrong, and daring, whose lamp of genius was infinitely more vivid, and his place in poetry greater, but whose warm flesh and

blood encumbered his way even more than madness and misery did that of his contemporary. They never met, and knew little of each other; nevertheless, their work had a similar influence. The one in his blue bonnet, the other in his invalid night-cap, they stand at the great gates which had been neatly barred and bolted by the last generation, and, pushing them abroad upon their unwilling hinges, made English poetry free as she had been before.

The mind of Burns and his career launches us into an entirely changed atmosphere and new scene. He was a son of the soil, without education, without culture, without friends; all he had in the world, save a well-knit frame and arms strong to work, was genius, against which there was every possible obstacle placed, that it should not be able to do itself justice. Cowper did not begin to write till he was over fifty; Burns was done with poetry, and all things earthly, at thirty-seven. The one was a mild and feminine nature, without passion or any fleshly impulse; the other a strong and headlong being made up of them. It is strange to note how they worked together in absolute unconsciousness of their joint mission. It is difficult even to realise that the "Task" was published only two years before that volume of varied and desultory verse which raised the Ayrshire ploughman at once to the rank of poet, not in his own district or country alone, but for the world. We will not ask which of the two was the greatest wonder; though, indeed, in our own mind we have little doubt on the subject, and cannot but feel that a fresh, new, and impassioned

spirit was the natural fountain from which new life might be expected to spring. Burns was free by nature of all bondage of models or rules. If any preceding poet could be said to be his master, it was such a homely and unpretending oracle as Allan Ramsay, who died the year before he was born. If the transmigration of souls were a tenable faith, it would be a pleasant superstition to believe that the simple and genial writer of the "Gentle Shepherd" had been permitted to come back again after his bookselling and all his little activities, and to learn what it cost to be a great poet, in the body—so unlike his—of that only rustic who has ever reached the highest rank in poetry. He and a certain foolish young Robert Ferguson, of whom nobody would have known anything had not Burns taken his memory into a kind of worship—and the ballads and old songs that are in the air of every Scotch countryside—were all the literature Burns was born to. Afterwards, when he struggled, with that heavenly yet not always profitable thirst which used to be characteristic of the Scotch peasant, into some acquaintance with general literature, his mind had already taken its form; and almost everything that was dictated by what his contemporaries thought to be better taste, has been condemned by the judgment of posterity. With a new life to elucidate, and all the primary passions and impulses of humanity to furnish him with poetic themes, he was far better off in his ignorance than the cultivated critics who patronised him afterwards, and made allowances for

his rusticity. He was at the fountainhead of life, and had nothing in him to obscure that vividness of sight which is the poet's first qualification. That he used a form of language which had not followed the laws of progress, and was no longer the language of the well-bred and cultured classes, was a more serious drawback; but that language, again, has its felicities as well as its disadvantages, and was infinitely better for Burns, as remaining still national, than if he had been born in Yorkshire or Lancashire. In short, so far as his birth and training went, Burns, we believe, had a better beginning than, for the purpose he was to serve in the history of his race, he could have had elsewhere.

If it were not a necessity of civilisation that greatness should involve social elevation, and that the poet should be supposed to fail in life if his genius does not bring him into the society of the higher classes, there would be no more occasion for regretting the birth of a poet in a labourer's cottage than there is for regretting the birth of a statesman in a duke's castle. But it is hopeless to think of persuading either the great writer himself, or the world, that his rising in poetry ought not to involve "rising in life." This was the grand curse of Burns's existence. It was a rise in life for him when the jovial attorneys and doctors of the little Ayrshire town invited him to join in their booses and their controversies. It was high advancement to gain an entrance to the houses of the rural gentry; and when he came the length of Edinburgh, its professors, and its dinner-parties, what

better paradise remained for the ploughman? But none of these fine things were for the advantage either of his art or of himself. His early patrons enlisted his genius in miserable personal vulgarities of abuse which that genius has pitifully preserved to this day, to the dismay of all wholesome minds; and his fine Edinburgh friends wanted him to write a tragedy, and to abandon his familiar tongue for the stilted traditions of the poetry of the period. These are dangers from which, in their worst aspect, a man is spared by being born a gentleman; and they were far more hard upon Burns, and more detrimental to his welfare, than any other disadvantage of his origin.

Robert Burns was born the son of two hard-working country people; small farmers, yet not much above the condition of farm-labourers; very poor, proudly upright, and independent. His father, a man of the lofty and somewhat stern character which Scotland is credited with, maintained a desperate conflict with poverty till the end of his life, and never did more than keep the wolf from the door. In external circumstances they were scarcely better off than the villagers whose claim for Christmas coals and blankets is one of the chartered rights of English country life; but in mind they were as haughty as the Doges, holding charity as poison and debt as shame. This virtue of independence was the one only point in the family character that threatened to grow morbid. It affected the manners and ways of thinking of the poet in after years in a way which did him much harm, and embittered his feelings, at once to those who served, and

those who neglected him; but this was certainly a failing which leant to virtue's side. Never was there a more attractive picture than that of this peasant household amid the ceaseless care and privations of their life. Their first little farm was sterile and profitless; the second promised better, but there, too, ill-luck overtook them in the shape of a doubtful lease and hard-hearted factor. The boys had to set to work as soon as their young strength permitted, and Robert had begun to do a man's work by the time he was fifteen. He and his brother Gilbert were sent to school as occasion served, for a few years regularly, and then, as they grew older, "week and week about," as they could be spared from the farm work. When there was no possibility of schooling, "my father," says Gilbert Burns, "undertook to teach us arithmetic in the winter evenings by candle-light; and in this way my two elder sisters received all their education." The kindly mother moved but and ben while the fireside lessons were going on, and sang them songs in the gloaming; and a certain old Jenny, brimful of ghost stories and all the ballads of the countryside, frightened and charmed the children with her endless lore. In this way, besides the breathing sweetness of the homely music, that floating literature of simple song, full of story, full of sentiment, becomes familiar to many a rustic who is penetrated by it while scarcely knowing it to be poetry. Burns had thus the training of a complete system of rustic sentiment, philosophy, and humanity before his mind had come in contact with printed

literature at all. The songs of the countryside were his A B C. In these lowly regions there was no idea that "the words" were an unimportant part of the performance — that they were not, indeed, the song itself, however essential it might be to have "a bonnie tune." We do not know if there has been any change in this respect among Scotch peasants; but it would not have been difficult to find in former days men and women both, whose heads were full of these songs, though they could not sing a note; and this would seem to have been Burns's case. The untaught continuous strain, mostly of love and of its woes, though with all kinds of simple variations, from the profound pathos of "Waly-waly"—

> "Oh Martinmas wind! when wilt thou blaw,
> And shake the dead leaves frae the tree?
> Oh gentle death! when wilt thou come,
> And tak' a life that wearies me?"

to the long-drawn rustic farce of "Get up and bar the door"—was almost the only sound of gaiety in the serious house. "Nothing could be more retired than our manner of living (the narrative continues); we rarely saw anybody but the members of our own family. . . . My father was for some time almost the only companion we had. He conversed familiarly on all subjects with us, as if we had been men, and was at great pains while we accompanied him in the labours of the farm, to lead the conversation to such subjects as might tend to increase our knowledge or confirm us in virtuous habits. He borrowed Salmon's *Geographical Grammar* for us, and endeavoured

to make us acquainted with the situation and history of the different countries in the world, while from a book society in Ayr he procured for us the reading of Durham's *Physics and Astro-theology* and Ray's *Wisdom of God in Creation*, to give us some idea of astronomy and natural history. Robert read all these books with an avidity and industry scarcely to be equalled."

Imagine the ploughboys in their winter evenings gathered about the solitary candle on the table, or smoky little oil-lamp, with those sober treatises before them, reading "with avidity," while the cheerful glow of the fire lighted up the one homely room which was kitchen and parlour and hall, and the mother's quick cheerful coming and going, and her songs, not loud enough to disturb them, gave a lively, kindly background to the little group—work over, supper preparing, warmth and rest about them. It would not have been half so picturesque, and probably there might not have been the same strain after better things, had William Burness's cottage been the laird's house; there tutors and governors would have had all the responsibility; here the serious toil-worn peasant, already growing old, helping his boys to acquire a little information on solid subjects such as commended themselves to his sober spirit, brings in an element of far higher interest. After all, one wonders whether the mother's songs did not do more for at least one of the lads than Salmon's *Geographical Grammar*. But who was to know that?

These peaceful evening scenes were often painfully

interrupted. Sometimes threatening letters would come from the factor — letters threatening roup (auction) and jail, the two horrors of the poor — which "used to set us all in tears;" no separation of interests here, or division between the elder and younger, but that perfect union which made the family one. Sometimes there would be a rare visitor to interrupt the studies. On one distinct occasion, of which a record exists, the young dominie who had taught the boys spent an evening in the smoky cheerful farm-kitchen. He brought with him of all things in the world the tragedy of "Titus Andronicus," "and by way of passing the evening he began to read the play aloud. We were all attention for some time, till presently the whole party were dissolved in tears. A female in the play" (says Gilbert Burns) "had her hands chopped off (I have but a confused remembrance of it), and then was insultingly desired to call for water to wash her hands. At this, in an agony of distress, we with one voice desired he would read no more. My father observed that if we would not hear it out, it would be needless to leave it with us. Robert replied, that if it was left he would burn it." Most likely the young dominie considered the raw head and bloody bones business (which surely Shakspeare had nothing to do with) would be the right kind of excitement for the farmer's children; but the future poet was a bold critic in the indignant purity of his young imagination. Is there not something in these scenes, over which the mind lingers more tenderly than if this boy's education

had been in the hands of the most learned scholars? And when the books were laid aside, and the porridge eaten, and the homely yet hospitable table cleared, came the family service, the "Let us worship God," which, in the confidential intercourse between the brothers, Robert told Gilbert had always seemed to him the most solemn of utterances. A sketch of family life more pure, more true, or more touching, was never made.

But this existence, though so beautiful to look back upon, was a very hard one. "The cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave," the poet himself says—with an exaggeration which rarely comes into his poetry, but is scarcely ever absent from his prose—looking back upon that struggle when he seemed to have reached the heights of fame, and probably hoped to have escaped poverty for ever. His brother is more moderate, but still with a deep gravity relates the story of their laborious youth. "To the buffetings of misfortune," he says, "we could only oppose hard labour and the most rigid economy. We lived very sparingly. For several years butchers' meat was a stranger in the house, while all the members of the family exerted themselves to the utmost of their strength, and even beyond it, in the labours of the farm. My brother at the age of thirteen assisted in threshing the crops of corn, and at fifteen was the principal labourer on the farm, for we had no hired servant, male or female. The anguish of mind that we felt at our tender years under these straits and difficulties was great. To

think of our father now growing old (for he was above fifty), broken down with the long-continued fatigues of his life, with a wife and five other children, and in a declining state of circumstances—these reflections produced in my brother's mind and mine sensations of the deepest distress." But nevertheless the lads were young and capable of throwing off their "deep distress" whenever the factor's letter or some other immediate pinch of misery was a few days, or perhaps a few hours off. At fifteen Robert fell in love for the first time with "a bonnie sweet sonsie lass," who was his partner in the harvest-field, following him closely along the golden rig, as the manner was, binding as he cut the rustling poppy-mingled grain. She "sang sweetly" a song composed by a small country laird's son on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love—and the dark sunburnt glowing boy, with the thrill of a new emotion stirring through him, ran into song too, moved by emulation, and by all those dawning "thoughts, and passions, and delights," which are the ministers of love. "My Nelly's looks are blyth and sweet," sang the fifteen-year-old boy in his rapture in the golden autumn sunshine among the golden corn. He is not much to be pitied after all. The scene is Arcadian in its tender innocence, lit up with a sweet glow of natural light and colour, but no heat of premature or unnatural passion. The little scene in the harvest-field balances with its sweet daylight, its first love and first song, the Rembrandt interior of the farm-house kitchen and its copy-books. "Puirtith cauld," such as "wrecks the heart," and

labours without ceasing—but at the same time warm, natural, hopeful life, and poetry and love: a prince could not have more.

We need not linger upon the little literature which he added after the days of the Geographical Grammar to so many better things. He read Addison and Pope in addition to the serious works chosen by his father. His boyish imagination was much stirred by the "Vision of Mirza," and his literary ambition aroused by the accidental possession of "a small collection of letters by the most eminent writers"—an unfortunate acquisition, if they had any share in forming his own style in correspondence, which was always bad, pompous, and affected. And he began the Latin "Rudiments," and acquired, by book, a little French—all very fine things for a ploughboy to aspire to, though of little advantage to him. What is much more important, however, than this, and other little attempts at self-improvement, reading-clubs, night-schools, and educational efforts of various kinds—things very fine to hear of in the case of an ordinary peasant lad, but very unfruitful when the peasant is a Burns—he lived his toilsome life in innocence, in close companionship with his excellent brother Gilbert, and in loyal devotion to his home. His early poems are full of the delightful compensations which God and poetry gave him for his premature toil. When he looked back upon his youth in after years, in prose, in the pompous retrospect of a letter to some fine person, with whom the poet was minded to show himself equally fine, he speaks gloomily and even

bitterly of that toil: but never in verse—never in the happy unconscious utterances of his youth.

> "I mind it weel in early date,
> When I was beardless, young, and blate,
> An' first could thresh the barn;
> Or haud a yokin' at the pleugh,
> An' tho' forfoughten sair enow,
> Yet unco proud to learn."

What better representation could be given of youthful progress than this of the "happy weary" boy, "sair forfoughten," but proud and glad of his advance to his heritage, a man's work? "He is hardly to be envied," says Mr. Lockhart, "who can contemplate without emotion this exquisite picture of young nature and young genius." And even when he grew older and fell into those habits of Scottish country life, which unfortunately so often lead to mischief, there is no deterioration visible in the young poet for some time. He "went ower the hills to Nannie," though the wastlin' wind blew both rude and chill, and the day's darg had been long and heavy; and no corrupt heart could have written words of such honest and noble simplicity as those that tell the story of those pilgrimages—

> "Our auld gudeman delights to view
> His sheep an' kye thrive bonnie, O;
> But I'm as blythe that hauds his pleugh,
> An' has nae care but Nannie, O.
>
> "A country lad is my degree,
> An' few there be that ken me, O;
> But what care I how few they be,
> I'm welcome aye to Nannie, O."

Never was a more manly song. And the other love-songs of this youthful period all strike the same true note of sentiment, refined and exquisite in their homeliness, as if they had been the wooings of a prince—

"Yestreen, when, to the trembling string,
The dance gaed thro' the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw:
Tho' this was fair, and that was braw,
And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sigh'd, and said amang them a',
Ye are na Mary Morison."

Could there be a more delicate expression of that supremacy of one, which is too penetrating, too ethereal, to mean merely a Judgment of Paris, a selection of the most beautiful? Far beyond that ignoble conflict goes our ploughboy; sweet though they all are, they are not Mary Morison—and his heart has no more to say; an inspiration which the most diligent study of classical models or other means of culture could never have given. Among the Mauchline lads and lasses, dancing wild reels with many a snap of the fingers and rustic shout, who taught him this highest delicacy of passion? Even when the sentiment is less exquisite it is always manly and honest. Principal Shairp laments the country custom of nightly meetings at doors or windows, meetings for which the rustic lover will walk miles over hill and dale after his day's work, and which the milkmaids and serving lasses calculate upon as others do upon the joys of society, as the chief relaxation of their

lives. No good comes of these nightly trysts to many, and probably little good came to Burns; but as he sets forth on "the Lammas night," when—

> "The sky was blue, the wind was still,
> The moon was shining clearly,"

to watch the barley rigs with Annie: or when he invites another "charmer" on a clear evening, when "thick flies the skimming swallow," to stray with him upon his "gladsome way," and to note the beauty of the autumn landscape—

> "The rustling corn, the fruited thorn,
> And every happy creature,"

it is hard to think of any possible harm. Every one of these bursts of song reveals to us the sweet country-side with all its woods and streams, the tender silence of nature, the "happy living things," which the poet loves with all the genial warmth of a nature which is in friendship and harmony with everything God has made. The lark which

> "'Twixt bright and dark,
> Blythe waukens by the daisy's side,"

is as near to him as the shepherd that "o'er the moorland whistles shrill"—and all nature is populous to his universal sympathy. A man with such exuberance of tender thought and winning words was, as might be expected, welcome everywhere to the rustic maidens, to whom it was as sweet as to any princess to receive such tuneful homage. No woman at that day, in any language (unless it were the Kätchens and Friederikas, by whom Goethe was educating him-

self to all the varieties of emotion, in the depths of Germany), had such exquisite homage offered to her as had Mary Morison, whoever she may have been; and it is a curious thing to realise that in all the English-speaking races, there was not one but this Ayrshire rustic to whom that mystery of pure and perfect feeling was revealed.

The medicine of this fresh and simple nature was what sick poetry wanted to restore the noblest of the arts. It was obtained here at the very fountain-head. As the great world rolls slowly one surface after another to the shining of the sun, so when a new creator arises a whole new earth comes gradually into sight before the eyes of the astonished lookers on. The native sphere of Burns was so unknown, that though his mission, like that of Cowper's, was more to reveal than to invent, yet the surprise of the new country discovered was to the rest of mankind like that of a creation. A few rural voices had indeed made the air tingle here and there, producing upon the world around an effect not much unlike that which might have followed had the sheep opened their mouths to emit couplets instead of bleatings; but rare prodigies of this kind had generally proved to have little more to say than might have come from the sheep. But Burns came, like Homer, from the very fountainhead of life: nobody had taught him a note, he had his music from nature, and he took his theme from nature. He was as little afraid of the homeliest facts of his landscape as Cowper was, and as observant of every change of the atmosphere;

but the principle which Cowper applied only to the external country Burns employed for the inner man, reproducing all that was in him with a dauntless freedom more remarkable still. And Burns was so much the greater poet, and had in him such a sweep and rush of inspiration, as well as such a superior force of life, and all the added impetuosity of passion, that his advent was far more startling and effective than that of his gentler fellow. One wonders if they had ever met what would have been their mutual impressions? Would Burns have set down the mild recluse as one of the unco good, or Cowper stigmatised his brother as a rural rake? Nothing could be more likely; and yet in his heart there was nothing that so touched the one as true religion, and nothing that more attracted the other than the life and vigour in which he was himself so deficient. They were both equally withdrawn, though in ways so different, from the excitements and emulations of literary coteries. Silence surrounded them in their walks, though the middle-aged Englishman's was but an invalid's stroll by the flat river side, or over the tranquil fields—while the young ploughman "walked in glory and in joy, following his plough along the mountain side;" but they were equal rebels to the world and all its conventional ways.

The poet's education was thus conducted with ideal fitness, until he attained the age of twenty-three—an age at which a young man in his rank is often a husband and a father; for hard work and early independence are very maturing influences. And so long

as he kept in his natural rustic sphere, with all its roughnesses and privations, its evening trystes, and miscellaneous love-making, no fault, it would seem, could be found with him. He worked early and late, and had many anxieties. He kept free of debt (which he always held in horror) upon £7 a year. As they worked at the farm-work he would communicate one poem after another to Gilbert, who is in his way as great a wonder as the poet himself, to those who do not understand what a poor Scotch countryman might be. One of the productions thus communicated was the "Epistle to Davie," which we may accept as the young ploughman's theory and philosophy of life as he saw it :

"What tho' like commoners of air,
We wander out, we know not where,
But[1] either house or hall?
Yet nature's charms, the hills and woods,
The sweeping vales, and foaming floods
Are free alike to all.
In days when daisies deck the ground,
And blackbirds whistle clear,
With honest joy our hearts will bound
To see the coming year;
On braes, when we please, then,
We'll sit an' sowth a tune;
Syne rhyme till't, we'll time till't,
And sing't when we hae done.

"Then let us cheerfu' acquiesce;
Nor make our scanty pleasures less,
By pining at our state;

[1] Without.

And, even should misfortunes come,
I, here wha sit, hae met wi' some,
An's thankfu' for them yet.
They gie the wit of age to youth;
They let us ken oursel':
They make us see the naked truth,
The real guid and ill.
Tho' losses, and crosses,
Be lessons right severe,
There's wit there, ye'll get there,
Ye'll find nae other where."

These verses were repeated by Robert to Gilbert in the summer of 1784, shortly after their father's death, when they were working together at Mossgiel, the new farm in which each member of the family had embarked all that he and she had, or could do, in the hope of being able to live and toil together. It was "in the interval of harder labour when he and I were working in the garden (kailyard). I believe," adds Gilbert, "the first idea of Robert's becoming an author was started on this occasion." As they worked among the kail, the one said to the other that the verses were good, as good as Allan Ramsay—sweetest praise to the author's ears! and that "they would bear being printed." The writer and receiver of the rhymed epistle were both country lads, like the critic; and these were the sentiments which naturally occurred to them, and the style that pleased them. It was at Mossgiel that he first inscribed himself, in some moment of triumph, upon the books in which he copied out his verses, "Robert Burns, Poet," and this was the "auld clay biggin'" where, as he sat and eyed the smoke that filled the air with a "mottie misty" haze,

the vision of Coila blushing "sweet like modest worth," with her "wildly witty rustic grace," and her eyes which "beamed keen with honour," "stepped ben," stopping the rash vow he was about to make to rhyme no more.

And during the two years they here laboured together, doing badly, yet by no fault of theirs, Gilbert remembered, with proud and tender faithfulness, other days and places in which communications of a similar kind were made to him. Once when the two were "going together with carts for coal to the family (and I could yet point out the particular spot), the author first repeated to me the 'Address to the Deil.'" Another poem he heard "as I was holding the plough and he was letting the water off the field beside me." The "Cottar's Saturday Night" was repeated to him on a Sunday afternoon walk, one of the few moments of leisure in their laborious life, and Gilbert was "electrified," as well he might be. During these years Burns was working not less but more hard than an ordinary ploughman, fighting desperately to keep his position as a farmer, however poor, rather than become another farmer's hired-servant, which was the only alternative; and in the midst of his toils, unknown, with Gilbert for his audience, poured forth a torrent of poetry as sweet and fresh and wholesome as the country breezes. This was not a deluge of love-songs only, as we are disposed to believe. Among these early productions were pictures of Scottish life such as no man had dreamed of before, and which lit up all Scotland with an illumination of tender light;

soft outbursts of humour, genial poetic laughter—and mingled with these such friendly rural philosophies, such pathetic thoughtfulness, pity, and charity, as go direct to the heart. Every influence around him entered into his soul. Its door stood open night and day to receive everything that was weak and wanted succour, to admit everything that was lovely and noble. In all the world there was not a created thing which he shut out from his sympathy, from the "cowering timorous beastie" in the fields to "Auld Nickie-ben" in "yon lowin heugh," which he was "wae to think upon," even for the sake of the father of evil. He is like a god in his tender thoughtfulness, his yearning for the welfare of all. When he wakes by night and hears the storm shake the walls of the clay cottage, he does not hug himself in his individual warmth and comfort, or even draw close the curtains, and trim the fire, like the other poet, on the banks of the Ouse, but cannot get to sleep again for thinking of the creatures out-of-doors:

"List'ning, the doors an' winnocks rattle,
I thought me on the ourie cattle,
Or silly sheep, wha bide this brattle
O' winter war;
And thro' the drift, deep-lairing sprattle,
Beneath a scaur.

"Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing,
That, in the merry months of spring
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o' thee?
Where wilt thou cower thy chittering wing,
An' close thy e'e!"

Who could have supposed that of all places in the world a fellow-feeling so exquisite, so delicate, so tender, was waking under the roof of a clay cottage, and thinking, like heaven itself, of the humblest things—the sparrows that do not fall to the ground without our Father? Cowper was the gentlest of men, making pets even of hares, and turning with loathing from him who would crush a worm; but it is not to his sensitive spirit that the darkness opens, and the silly sheep and the helpless birds show themselves in the dreary midnight, unfortunate brothers for whom his heart bleeds. If it had been but for this one revelation, that recording angel of whom we have heard so much might have blotted out a thousand peccadilloes. "He prayeth best that loveth best all things, both great and small."

But at this period there were few offences with which to reproach the young poet. He had taken no ill turn as yet in his rustic career. So far as we can see, his country life was even marked with aspirations towards pleasures more elevated than the ordinary round of fairs and midnight courtships. He and Gilbert and five others established a club for "literary purposes" in their village. There was no place to hold its meetings save the public-house, but the expenditure of each member was limited to threepence, to avoid evil consequences. Their object was "to relax themselves after toil, to promote sociability and friendship, and to improve the mind." The little Tarbolton club debated the question whether prudence or inclination should be most considered in

marriage, and other sentimental and social subjects. They "found themselves so happy" that when the club had existed a year they gave a dance in its honour; that is, they met together, each one with the partner of his choice, "and spent the evening in such innocence and merriment, such cheerfulness and good humour, that every brother will long remember it with pleasure and delight." If we did not know, alas! the darker shadows that always haunt the rural life of Scotland, this narrative would read like Arcadia. When the brothers removed to Mossgiel, near Mauchline, they originated a similar club there, with which Dr. Currie finds fault on the strange ground that the books chosen by the little society were "less calculated to increase the knowledge than to refine the taste." Imagine taste existing at all or any refinement in a ploughmen's club in a Scotch village a hundred years ago! And we talk of progress in these days! But Burns was not destined to remain in this humble society. As his reputation grew, and his early poems became known, people much above his own condition in life began to hear of the moorland poet, and he fell into the hands of his betters, in an evil hour.

The little town of Mauchline would seem to have possessed, as most country towns did, and still do, perhaps, with a difference, a jovial society, not very scrupulous or very refined, but full of a kind of rude wit and boisterous good-fellowship, according to the fashion of the time. The high jinks of Scott's lawyers give us a sketch of this kind of wild and witty com-

pany at its best; but even that, if touched by any hand less than a master's, and dealing with any class less remarkable than the wits of the Parliament House, might easily bear a very different aspect. In a little country town, at a period when manners were coarser and license greater than at present, the jovial coterie was almost without restraint. The women were used to the absorption of the men in toddy and talk all the evening through, and the minister in many cases shared both—unless he happened to be one of those unreasonable Puritans of the New Light, who objected to everything that was comfortable, and at whom they laughed with furious jokes and merriment till the roof rang. The only leaven of this society, the salt that kept it from corruption, was its genuine humour and appreciation of everything comical, and a rude energy and boisterous fun that was in it. The heavy country wits, with snuff lying in the wrinkles of their long waistcoats, and an atmosphere of whisky breathing round them, had yet an eye for a joke, and took a grim pleasure in watching the follies of their neighbours. They were men sometimes of good birth and connections, allied to the neighbouring gentry, and proud of their connection, though familiar, as the Scottish code of manners has always permitted, with all classes, and having their joke wherever they went. The "writer," who probably was the younger son of some neighbouring laird, the doctor, the factor of the nearest duke or marquis, any idle man with enough to live upon, belonged to this noisy coterie. Mr. Skelton, in his recent sketch of the "Year One,"

describes it in his little town as consisting of the provost, the lawyer, the captain of the coastguard, and the minister, the latter no less daring in jest, if a little more careful in conduct, than the others. They were ready to give a jocose patronage to religion when this was the case; but when a zealous minister, calling them to account for their peccadilloes, occupied the parish, then the very air rang with the guffaws of their defiance and ridicule.

The first social elevation that Burns obtained was when he was admitted into the company of these choice spirits. A man who could sing a good song (especially if he had made it before singing it), or produce a lively play of hazardous jokes, or add a spice of novelty of any kind to their vigorous coarse talk, was sure of a welcome among them. Burns no doubt believed devoutly that he was being elevated to the best society when he was taken up by the Aikens and Hamiltons; and when he found nothing better than the gossip of a clique, and the cleverness of local malice, disappointment, if at all events perhaps an easier sense of familiarity, must have been in his mind. But it was no doubt a gratification to him to be made a member of the clique, and initiated into its personal hatreds and jocular malignities, till at last, in his genuine yet fictitious enthusiasm of good-fellowship, he lifted the clear voice, given him for purposes so much more noble, to sing to the confusion of his patrons' adversaries, adding sharp darts of his own to their vulgar jibes and coarse badinage. This is the evident reason

why it happened that the young poet, till that time the truest new revelation of poetic genius within the limits of Britain, nay, in the universe itself (with the exception of young Goethe in Frankfort), opened his public career — he who had so much fine and tender and humorous poetry in his old scrap-books at home—with a string of verses in which bad taste and profane meaning had not even wit or power to justify, or the headlong race of poetic excitement to excuse them. This was what the patronage of his betters did for him. From the "Epistle to Davie" to the "Twa Herds," what an inconceivable downfall! the first full of all the tranquil breadth of nature, the sober yet ever pleasant and cheerful light of morning, before misfortune had any bitterness, or individual passion or anguish had disturbed the confidence of youth in its own fate; the other a miserable local squib, requiring pages of explanation, filled with strange names of persons we know nothing about, bristling with allusions which never could have possessed any zest or flavour, save to those who were acquainted with the temporary and unlovely squabbles of the countryside. A more terrible satire could not have been than the probably quite unconscious one which the young poet implied in the care he took to suit his style to his audience—to rustic Davie and Gilbert those manly views of life and labour which would not misbecome a philosopher; to the wits of Mauchline the servility of a rude personal attack. Burns did not intend any such blighting comparison, but the reader is justified in making it when

he sees the debasement of this Samson making sport for the Philistines. It could not be helped. The nearest aristocracy, such as it was, was bound to notice the local poet. Would that they had let him alone in the better atmosphere into which he was born! but by this time he had already begun to stumble out of that good and pure atmosphere, into dark ways—leading to those precipices from which no precautions taken by others can divert the footsteps of wayward men.

It is wonderful, however, to realise how many of Burns's finest productions were written at this period. Even in the objectionable vein thus opened, there were triumphs to be obtained. Two or three others as objectionable, and with as few redeeming qualities as the "Twa Herds"—the "Kirk's Alarm," and "The Ordination," followed—exactly the kind of verses which would naturally be produced by the coarse and clever poet of a village—the man whose personal satires are always received by his limited circle with "a roar of applause." But we think Principal Shairp and other grave critics are mistaken when they class together all Burns's attacks upon the unco good. "Holy Willie's Prayer" is a very different production from the others. It is equally, or indeed, more profane; but it is the highest kind of satire, awful in its vivid reality, a condensed and terrible picture which outdoes Tartuffe. The Hypocrite, a figure which all the poets cannot extirpate from the world, but which is their legitimate prey wherever it is found, stands out before us in a blaze of infernal

light. We are not sure even that we can regret the profane suggestion which turned the poet's eye upon such a personification of evil. This tremendous sketch wants no explanatory notes, no disguise of forgotten initials; the Mauchline coterie, with many a peal of delighted laughter, might identify the victim, as the French critics did also in Molière's day; but it does not add to our terror or awe, to know that he had a living prototype and an ordinary name; and no virtuous prejudice, however natural, can be permitted to interfere with the immortality of such a poem. In all his maturer years, when his mind might be supposed to have more affinity with the tragic aspects of existence, Burns never again struck so strong and true a note.

But everything he touched in this youthful heyday of his powers was full of vigour. It would be natural to suppose that these were the days of the love songs, and that the humour and the thought came later. But this is not the case. The best of the songs came, indeed, out of the fulness of his too susceptible heart in this period; but he had a mind also for other things. What a varied and inexhaustible storehouse must that have been, out of which, side by side with "Holy Willie," came the most perfect of homely idylls, "The Cottar's Saturday Night," and, on the other hand, the "Address to the Deil," with its ripe and humorous philosophy and tender-heartedness. Milton dignified his Satan into one of the grandest of heroes: but no man was ever "wae to think upon yon den" before this young

ploughman. And what martial poet ever produced a figure more daring and splendid than that of the soldier whom this ploughman paints for us in lines of fire, in the ode which he consecrates, alas! to Scotch Drink, the most fatal of all the ills of Scotland—

> "But bring a Scotsman frae his hill,
> Clap in his cheek a Highland gill,
> Say, such is royal George's will,
> An' there's the foe,
> He has nae thought but how to kill
> Twa at a blow.
>
> "Nae cauld, faint-hearted doubtings tease him;
> Death comes, wi' fearless eyes he sees him;
> Wi' bluidy hand a welcome gies him;
> An' when he fa's,
> His latest draught o' breathin' lea'es him
> In faint huzzas."

Was there ever a more brilliant animated living picture? The "Highland gill," after all, has very little to do with it; but he whom no faint-hearted doubtings assail—whose rush of fervid valour is limited only by the thought how best to kill "twa at a blow," who breathes out in the face of death his faint huzzas—what a vision, rapid as the lightning, plucked out of the very heart of battle!

And does not the reader see how, as these poems grew and breathed into being, the veil of the unknown was lifted, and Lowland Scotland, sweet and cheerful, came to light as when the sun rises over an undiscovered land? Some one, we forget who, has directed attention lately to the place Scotland held in the

estimation of her rich and scornful yoke-fellow, before Burns and Scott were. Even Smollett, a Scotsman, dared say very little for his country. It was a land of sour fanatics, of penurious misers, of mean bowing and scraping, and servile arts of all kinds, a country which all its sons forsook as soon as possible, to fish and scrape a living out of English prodigality, and to promote their raw-boned countrymen over the honest Saxon, who was no match for their grovelling cunning. This was the best that was said for us on the other side of the Tweed. The extraordinary revolution of sentiment since (though still the old prejudice has left some unaccountable relics) is due entirely to the two poets, whose mission it was to make their country known. Burns was the first, and in some respects he was the greatest. His revelation was deeper, stronger, more original, and reached lower down—revealing almost more than a mere nationality in the warm and tender light by which he made Scotland visible: for he made the poor visible at the same time, the common people, the universal basis of society—not as objects of pity, which was the tendency of those pictures of Cowper's to which we have already referred, but as brethren, with the same faculties, the same enjoyments—and sometimes more beautiful and sacred enjoyments than many of their betters. Hard must that man's heart have been and opaque his intellect who, after reading the "Cottar's Saturday Night," could have looked with disdainful eyes upon any cottage: Scotland was the first object of the revelation—but after Scotland, mankind.

All this astonishing work was done before he was twenty-seven, while he was working early and late, living the life of a farm labourer, though he was his own master, and with no advantages so called, either in the shape of general culture or acquaintance with the best models. For our own part we are not sure that Burns's reputation would have been much lessened had he never written another line. Critics acquainted with the best models have given each other a sign to glorify the "Jolly Beggars" and "Tam o' Shanter:" but no one who loves Burns and understands him will turn we think, by preference, or direct any new reader to these later productions. He will rather glean out of the wealth of this marvellous youth, through which the poet passed in many a toil and trouble, yet, "in glory and in joy," following his plough. Alas, towards the end even of this prolific and wonderful season the glory and the joy lessened, and shame and sorrow came the poet's way. He began his downward career, in the manner always too facile to his countrymen. We do not need to repeat here the most distasteful story of the preliminary transactions between him and his future wife, or the marriage irregularly made, then broken, or supposed to be broken, notwithstanding all our deeply rooted terror of Scotch marriages—the father of Jean Armour preferring shame for her to the penniless, and it is to be feared, inconstant and unruly husband upon whom she had a legitimate claim. Recent investigators have been so cruel as to make it apparent that the story of "Highland Mary" occurred in one of the lulls of the twice broken and

twice renewed connection with Jean, so that the purity and sorrow of that tale—the well-known Sunday which Mary and her lover spent together on the banks of Ayr, swearing everlasting truth over the running water, with that Bible held between them, in which Burns had written the divine injunction to "perform thine oath;" and the still sadder wintry moonlight, in which he addressed his "Mary in Heaven"—lose something of their mournful tenderness; and we are forced to conclude that probably it was a good thing for Highland Mary that death stepped in, and that all she could ever claim was that pathetic recollection. The poor little moorland farm was a failure, not from any fault of the brothers, and the country-side would seem to have turned against the rural Lothario, who already had appeared more than once on "the stool of repentance" and received public admonition to little purpose. Even his Mauchline friends were estranged from him, one of them at least, it appears, agreeing with Jean Armour's father that it would be rash to put a woman's happiness in his hands. Burns's sky, a little while before so clear, seems all at once to have been covered with overwhelming storm-clouds. Nemesis works very rapidly with the poor: in this respect there is nothing that makes so much difference in life as wealth. The rich have time to sow their wild oats, but to the poor man the process cannot last long.

The poet was altogether overwhelmed by these sudden combinations of evil. No doubt it was

bitter beyond expression to him to have no backing of social sympathy and support, and the humiliation of being abandoned by his sweetheart (who was more than a sweetheart, by this time the mother of twin children), the bitter thought that shame was better than himself in the estimation of her family, and the grieved disapproval of his own—seem to have "worked like madness in his brain." He was ready to throw up the conflict altogether, to go to the West Indies and make a new beginning on a Jamaica estate, which probably, had he been any other ruined young prodigal in the country, would have been the very best thing he could do. But to make this new start money was necessary, and to get even so much money as would pay his passage was a difficult matter. In this strait, some one suggested the publication of the poetry which was kept in the drawer of a deal table, in the garret, which was his bedroom and study, at Mossgiel. Thus the greatest poetry of the age got to light, so to speak, accidentally, to assist the poet in banishing himself and retrieving his miserable fortunes far from the country he loved. A curious air of chance and caprice is thus thrown over the kindred events, happening within a couple of years, which meant so much for English literature. The "Task," the invalid's amusement, playfully undertaken to please "the fair," was printed in 1784. The date of Burns's downfall, and of the sudden necessity for money to pay his passage to Jamaica, was a little later: in 1786, out of the humble printing-press at Kilmarnock, in an edition of six hundred copies, and

with a subscription of three hundred and fifty, his poetry appeared, nobody concerned thinking of much more than a local popularity, the applause of the people who spoke his own rustic language and knew every bank and brae which he had celebrated in his verse.

And for a little while this seems to have been all it attained. What should we know now, with all our additional facilities of communication, of a little volume of poems modestly published at Kilmarnock? Natural curiosity, anxiety, and hope kept him lingering to see what would happen before he went away. He got twenty pounds as his share of the profits—more than enough for his passage-money—and the fame of the little book "spread like wildfire" in the countryside. One or two local magnates sought his acquaintance; among them Dugald Stewart, who was temporarily resident in the neighbourhood, and Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, one of the county aristocracy. He was pleased, no doubt: but still took his steerage passage to Jamaica, and sent off his chest to Greenock. It was on a gloomy autumn night that he left the manse of Loudoun, where he had gone to take leave of the minister, Dr. Lawrie, a friend who was even then exerting himself busily, but secretly, on the poet's behalf: and gloomier still were his confused and melancholy thoughts. As he strode over the dreary moorland in the gathering darkness, hope forsook the young man thus "abandoned, exiled, and forlorn." "Farewell!" he said, with all the bitterness of the parting swelling over him—

"Farewell! old Coila's hills and dales,
Her heathy moors and winding vales,
The scenes where wretched fancy roves,
Pursuing past unhappy loves.
Farewell! my friends, farewell my foes,
My peace with these, my love with those—
The bursting tears my heart declare,
Farewell! the bonnie banks of Ayr."

This was the very darkest moment before the dawn. He had scarcely gone from Loudoun manse when a letter arrived there from Dr. Blacklock in Edinburgh, a letter which the kind minister had been hoping for, which seems to have raised Burns at once from the depths of despondency to immediate and brilliant hope. "It was therefore much to be wished, for the sake of the young man," said the blind man of letters, after much praise of the volume his correspondent had sent to him, "that a second edition, more numerous than the former, could immediately be printed, as it appears certain that its intrinsic merits, and the exertions of the author's friends, might give it a more universal circulation than anything of the kind which has been printed within my memory." This was enough to change the aspect of heaven and earth to Burns; one of the special griefs in the combinations of distress that threatened to crush him having been the refusal of his Ayrshire publisher to run the risk of a second issue. Instead of going to Jamaica, he went to Edinburgh accordingly to push his fortune, with all the natural elation which such a change, and the prospect at last of real fame and success, naturally involved. Still, it will be perceived that it was for "the sake of

the young man himself" that Blacklock counselled this step, hoping for a "more universal circulation than *anything of the kind*" had received. It would have seemed the wildest nonsense to the literary circles in Edinburgh to suppose that this young prodigy of a ploughman could one way or other affect literature, or that his second edition was of importance in any interest but his own.

We will leave to a separate chapter our sketch of the literary society of Edinburgh as then flourishing. The attitude of Burns in respect to it is very curious and interesting. Here was a young peasant, without education, without knowledge of the world, full of Scotch reserve and that *farouche* pride of the rustic which reaches the height of a passion. The pride which is supposed to accompany blue blood and great descent has justifications outside of the individual possessed by it; and in most cases it imposes a certain restraint upon that individual, and demands of him some qualities, or at least some graces, in accordance with it. But the pride of a peasant is wildly personal, and independent of every consideration. The more he is conscious of his deficiencies even, the more wildly bent he will be upon attentions and observances due in society only to high social qualifications. From the moment when Burns steps into the light in Edinburgh, this mixture of shyness, inordinate self-opinion, and an almost polemical determination to prove himself the equal, if not the superior, of everybody round him, appears both in his behaviour and in the private records of his

opinions. It was no doubt a very difficult position. Uncultured, unaccustomed to the ways of society, knowing nobody, feeling himself a kind of vague representative, not only of genius but of man, among a curious crowd of superiors, all more or less disposed to infringe these rights, to patronise him, and lessen his own sense of dignity, he appears on the defensive, always watchful lest some affront should be intended; beguiled, indeed, into better moods in the warmth of social intercourse, but ever ready to take fire again, and to resent not only imaginary slights to himself, but even the civilities offered to others whom he thinks less worthy.

> "The rank is but the guinea stamp,
> A man's a man for a' that,"

is a very fine sentiment, but it is extremely troublesome when carried into society. It says much for the kind impressionableness of Burns's real nature, that, strolling about as he did, wrapped in this mantle of rustic haughtiness, more all-enveloping than the pride of kings, he did after all unbend sufficiently to attract as well as to dazzle the curious Edinburgh society, especially the ladies, whom he "carried off their feet," according to the characteristic Scotticism used by one of them, with his eloquence, his old-world deference and chivalry. This was quite in keeping with his character. Notwithstanding all his rustic adventures, it is evident that a certain chivalrous feeling towards women existed in him always, and the gentle condescen-

sion of a lady not only pleases the poetic imagination as fancifully right and becoming, but had nothing unpalatable in it to so manly a man. He is said to have made the remark, that whereas he had met in his own class with men as excellent, as thoughtful, and high-minded, as any he had encountered in these higher circles, yet that an accomplished woman was a being altogether new to him.

But while he owned this spell, being always too ready to yield to feminine fascinations—which is perhaps the most certain of all means of being liked by women—his general aspect was not so attractive. He entered Edinburgh shy and proud, yet full of expectations, in the end of November 1786, and instead of taking a lodging more appropriate, went to a "close" in the Lawnmarket where a Mauchline lad, Richmond by name, lived, and shared his room and his bed for the greater part of his stay, thus clinging to his friends and his natural condition, in the midst of so many changes, with a tenacity which has at least as much obstinate pride as tenderness in it. "I tremble," he says in one of his letters, "lest I should be ruined by being dragged too suddenly into the glare of polite and learned observation." This was only a fortnight after his arrival, but by that time he had a list of acquaintances which shows how ready his welcome had been. "I have been introduced to a good many of the noblesse, but my avowed patrons and patronesses are the Duchess of Gordon, the Countess of Glencairn, with my Lord,

and Lady Betty, the Dean of Faculty, Sir John Whitefoord; I have likewise warm friends among the literati, Professors Stewart, Blair, and Mr. Mackenzie, the 'Man of Feeling.'" The latter, a sort of miniature Scotch Addison, enjoying a very great reputation in his day, had reviewed Burns's early volume in the *Lounger*, a little periodical of the order of the *Rambler* and its many descendants, and this set him fully afloat in the knowledge of the world; for the paper is referred to by Cowper, and was widely read even in England.

Perhaps it was the fear of having his head turned by this sudden blaze of popularity which made Burns enter society with such a determination to hold his own. But granting this, there seems to have been little to find fault with in his demeanour. "In no part of his manner was there the slightest affectation," one of the bystanders tells us, "nor could a stranger have suspected from anything in his behaviour or conversation that he had been for some months the favourite of all the fashionable circles. In conversation he was powerful. His conceptions and expressions were of corresponding vigour, and on all subjects were as remote as possible from commonplaces. Though somewhat authoritative, it was in a way which gave little offence, and was readily imputed to his inexperience in those modes of smoothing dissent and softening assertion, which are important characteristics of polished manners." Dugald Stewart adds, "The attentions he received from all ranks would have turned any head but his

own. I cannot say that I perceived any unfavourable effect they left upon his mind. He retained the same simplicity which had struck me so forcibly when first I saw him in the country, nor did he seem to feel any additional self-importance from the number and rank of his new acquaintance. . . . The remarks he made on the characters of men were shrewd and pointed, though frequently inclining too much to sarcasm. His praises of those he loved were sometimes indiscriminate and exaggerated. . . . His wit was ready and always impressed with the marks of a vigorous understanding, but to my taste, not often pleasing or happy."

This was the impression he made on Edinburgh—that of a man fully aware of his own rights, and disdaining to show any excitement of complacency or elation at the notice taken of him. When he "furnished the greater part of the conversation," he did no more than what he saw evidently was expected of him; and appeared to society a wonderful phenomenon altogether, using language as good as the best, keeping his self-possession, setting vanity sternly at bay, upheld by the keenest inspiration of pride. There is nothing in his life more remarkable or more characteristic. His friends seem to have written to him on all sides, warning him against that intoxication of popular favour which has injured so many. To all he replies in the same tone, "I am willing to believe that my abilities deserve some notice. . . . I have studied myself, and know what ground I occupy, and however a friend or the world

may differ from me in that particular, I stand for my own opinion in silent resolve, with all the tenaciousness of property. When," he adds with a grandiloquence not so remarkable then as now, "When proud fortune's ebbing tide recedes, you will bear me witness that when my bubble of fame was at the highest, I stood unintoxicated, with the inebriating cup in my hand, looking forward with rueful resolve to the hastening time when the blow of Calumny shall dash it to the ground with all the eagerness of vengeful triumph!"

This anticipation recurs continually in his letters —whether with that conscious attempt to propitiate fate by foreseeing the worst, which is one of the expedients of natural superstition, or in real soberness of expectation, it is difficult to tell. "You are dazzled by newspaper accounts and distant reports," he says to another correspondent; "but in reality I have no great temptation to be intoxicated with the cup of prosperity. Novelty may attract the attention of mankind awhile; to it I owe my present *éclat*, but I see the time not far distant when the popular tide which has borne me to a height of which I am perhaps unworthy, shall recede with silent celerity and leave me a barren waste of sand, to descend at my leisure to my former station." All this is wise to a painful degree, but it is not so altogether discouraging as the occasional outbursts of bitterness which are to be found in the still more private repository of his thoughts.

"There are few of the sore evils under the sun give me more

uneasiness and chagrin than the comparison how a man of genius, nay, of avowed worth, is received everywhere, with the reception which a mere ordinary character, decorated with the trappings and futile distinctions of fortune meets. I imagine a man of abilities, his breast glowing with honest pride, conscious that men are born equal, still giving honour to whom honour is due. He meets at a great man's table a Lord Something or a Squire Somebody. He knows the noble landlord at heart gives the bard, or whatever he is, a share of his good wishes, beyond perhaps any one at table; yet how will it mortify him to see a fellow whose abilities would scarcely have made an eightpenny tailor, and whose heart is not worth three farthings, meet with attention and notice that are withheld from the sons of genius and poverty. The noble Glencairn has wounded me to the soul here, because I dearly esteem, respect, and love him. He showed so much attention, engrossing attention, one day to the only blockhead at table, that I was within half a point of throwing down my gage of contemptuous defiance."

This was the painful way in which the poet had the misfortune to contemplate that conventional standard of rank, which to more reasonable minds simplifies the regulations of society, and by making an entirely arbitrary rule, covers all the conflicts of *amour propre*, and invidious personal comparison. But, unfortunately, self-comparison was the rule of his life in this chapter of it. His peasant breeding did him no harm in his poetry, but it harmed him personally here, more than we can estimate, setting him entirely wrong in his relations to his fellows. With an extraordinary bravado of cynical sentiment, all the more extraordinary since it is ostensibly intended for no eye but his own, he begins a diary, in which he promises himself to "sketch every character that any way strikes me, to the best

of my power, with unshrinking justice." "I think," he adds, "a lock and key security at least equal to the bosom of any friend whatever." This was his unhappy mind in April of the following year, after three months' experience of Edinburgh: but what his experience was in full, it is better, perhaps, not to inquire too closely. The repression to which he subjected himself among his fine friends, naturally demanded some outlet on the other side, and this was not difficult to find. Men who, though inferior to his new patrons, were yet much above his natural level of society, men on a par, perhaps, with the Mauchline wits who had given him his first step of social elevation and moral debasement, held their doors open to him with a riotous welcome. He made up to himself among these jovial friends for the restraints of the more pretentious circles. Two of them who survived in his regard and became his correspondents afterwards, were masters in the High School; but the profession of a schoolmaster was not a certificate of character in those days, nor has it, strangely enough, ever been held in so much respect north of the Tweed, in the home of popular education, as in the other part of the island.

Burns left Edinburgh in May 1787. A letter of thanks to Dr. Blair for his kindness and hospitality has been preserved with the reply to it. Dr. Blair is very kind and even approving. "Your situation, as you say, was indeed very singular," he allows, "and in being brought out all at once from the shades of deepest misery to so great a share of public notice and obser-

vation, you had to stand a severe trial. I am happy that you have stood it so well;" but he gives the poet small encouragement to count upon his further acquaintance. "When you return, if you come this way, I will be happy to see you, and to know concerning your future plans of life;" he says—not a very warm invitation. Dr. Blair, too, is dishearteningly ready to allow that the brief day of glory is over. "You are now, I presume, to retire to a more private walk of life. . . . As you very properly hint yourself, you are not to be surprised if in your rural retreat you do not find yourself surrounded with that glare of notice and applause which has shone upon you," he says. It was all over, the lamps extinguished, the audience gone; he himself had settled that it would be so, and he had no right to grumble if his friends assented; and as a matter of fact, it is evident that they did assent.

In the midst of these painful indications of the jangling of the chords which had been so melodious, we may quote one or two pleasanter points in this brief Edinburgh career. "He walked with me in spring," Dugald Stewart writes, "early in the morning to the Braid Hills, when he charmed me still more by his private conversation, than he had ever done in company;" that is, Burns was once more himself in the free air, among the genial influences of nature, and in the society of one gentle spirit, not at that moment assuming the offensive guise of a patron. "He was passionately fond of the beauties of nature, and he once told me when I was admiring a distant prospect, in one of our many walks, that the sight of so many

smoking cottages gave a pleasure to his mind which none could understand, who had not witnessed, like himself, the happiness and worth which they contained." This comes to us with a sense of relief and happy return to nature and truth, for which we are truly grateful. And here is another little picture, simple as a vignette, which shows us how the poet appeared in the eyes of a lame shy boy seated in a corner of one of the Edinburgh drawing-rooms, blushing yet happy in the out-of-the-way knowledge which endless reading had given him. Burns had admired certain verses attached to an engraving: "He asked whose the lines were, and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne's, called by the unpromising title of the 'Justice of Peace.' I whispered my information to a friend present, who repeated it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and word which, though of mere civility, I received with great pleasure. . . . There was a strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large and of a dark cast, which glowed (I say literally glowed) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head." This is the description given by Walter Scott, then fifteen years old, of his contemporary of twenty-seven, which was all the age Burns had as yet attained.

Among the many advices which were given to the poet at this moment, which was the turning-point in his career, there were several which suggested a closer

application to poetry as the future occupation of his life. "Your lordship," he writes, "touches the darling chord of my heart, when you advise me to fire my muse at Scottish story and Scottish scenes." To Mrs. Dunlop, a kinder and more deeply interested counsellor, he repeats almost the same words. "Scottish scenes and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing. I have no dearer aim than to have it in my power, unplagued by the routine of business, for which heaven knows I am unfit enough, to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles; to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers; and to muse by the stately towers or venerable ruins, over the honoured abodes of her heroes.

"But these are all Utopian thoughts. I have dallied long enough with life; it is time now to be in earnest; I have a fond, an aged mother to care for; and some other bosom ties perhaps equally tender. . . . I guess that I shall clear between two and three hundred pounds by my authorship: with that sum I intend, so far as I may be said to have any intention, to return to my old acquaintance, the plough, and if I can meet with a lease by which I can live, to commence farmer. I do not intend to give up poetry; being bred to labour secures an independence, and the Muses are my chief, sometimes have been my only enjoyment. If my practice second my resolution, I shall have powerfully at heart the serious business of life; but while following my plough or building up my stacks, I shall cast a leisure glance to that dear, that only feature of my character which gave me the notice of my country."

He had been advised to write a tragedy; to give up his themes of common life and turn his attention towards more elevated subjects; to abandon his Scotch dialect, "Why should you, by using *that*, limit the

number of your admirers to those who understand the Scottish, when you can extend it to all persons of taste who understand the English language?" he is asked.

"In my opinion" (the speaker is Dr. Moore, the father of Sir John Moore, the author of *Zeluco*, and many other books, in his day a man of some literary reputation), "you should plan some larger work than any you have as yet attempted. I mean, reflect upon some proper subject, and arrange the plan of it in your mind without beginning to execute any part of it till you have studied most of the best English poets, and read a little more of history. The Greek and Roman stories you can read in some abridgment, and soon become master of the most brilliant facts, which must highly delight a poetical mind. You *should* also, and very soon *may*, become master of the heathen mythology, to which there are everlasting allusions in all the poets, and which is in itself charmingly fanciful. What will require to be studied with more attention is modern history, that is, the history of France and Great Britain from the beginning of Henry the Seventh's reign. I know very well you have a mind capable of attaining knowledge by a shorter process than is commonly used, and I am certain you are capable of making a better use of it, when attained, than is generally done."

This was the approved recipe for making a man of letters in those days. Thus cultivated, what doubt that a tragedy, a series of didactic poems, or any other special performance that might strike the fashion of the day, could be produced at pleasure? To Burns, who knew that he was already a poet, and had attained what none of these sage advisers could reach to, it may be supposed that this advice was by no means welcome. The authorities treated him as a beginner, one who had still his reputation to make.

"Take time and leisure to improve your talents, for on any second production you give the world, your *fate as a poet will very much depend,*" says Dr. Blair —as genial critics say now to a young novelist who has produced the first three volumes, which are to be the precursors of a hundred. Burns does not seem to have returned any distinct reply. "I have the advice of some very judicious friends among the literati here, but with these I sometimes find it necessary to claim the privilege of thinking for myself," he says to Mrs. Dunlop, when he informs her that it is his intention to return to "his old acquaintance the plough." And it is to the immortal credit of Burns's good sense that he never appears to have thought of taking up poetry as a trade. To roam about the country and study Scotch scenes and historical incidents for the purpose of writing poems about them for the market, never seems to have entered into his head. He had thought for some time of the Excise, which seems to have been a service somehow attractive to men who had otherwise failed in life, or who had no opening to more lucrative work about this period. A gauger has never been a popular character, yet, for some reason or other, young Scotchmen, desirous to make a step out of the class of artizans or small tradesmen, seem to have regarded it with favourable eyes, perhaps because it required little previous training, and still involved a spice of adventure. And Burns does not seem to have considered that there was anything derogatory in it. That, or a farm, perhaps both together, the one supplementing the other

—but not the struggles of a poor author, or an artificial trade of poetical manufactures. These were the days of Grub Street, when young writers went up to London with a few pounds in their pockets and a bundle of MSS., and flung themselves on the world blindly with the intention of living by what they called "the Muse." This is evidently what many of his patrons expected from Burns, and, we repeat, it is the greatest credit to him that he never thought of adopting such an occupation.

But all these recommendations, and the moderate friendliness which assured him, "if you are passing this way," that "I shall be happy to see you," and the mortified consciousness that this brilliant moment in his life was over, and that nothing remained, did not tend to increase his happiness. He made two expeditions—one into the Highlands, the other to the south of Scotland, with companions of, as appears, no elevating order, and with a bitterness in his heart that found vent in foolish cynicism, and sometimes in reproaches addressed to the great and rich, and anticipations of "illiberal abuse, and perhaps contemptuous neglect." But yet, wherever he went, he was received with honour and enthusiasm. A bitter and jealous fellow-traveller, who could not understand why Burns should be better received than himself, no doubt helped to exaggerate his uncomfortable frame of mind. The two dealt defiance round them, wrote rebellious verses on inn windows, and angry epigrams, and got very little enjoyment out of their journey. At one house he just missed Mr. Dundas, the dispenser of Scottish

patronage at the time; and at another, Mr. Addington, afterwards Prime Minister, was expected, both of whom might have been of use to the poet—but in both cases the jealous temper of his travelling companion hurried him away. Mr. Addington, however, furnishes a whimsical addition to the history at this point. He had been invited to meet Burns, of whose poetry he was a great admirer, and not coming, sent a sonnet in his place, complimenting the "pride of Scotia's favoured plains," and recommending to him a philosophical superiority to fate, in lines which would be cruel if they were not so ludicrous—

> "What though each morning sees thee rise to toil,
> Though Plenty on thy cot no blessing showers,
> Yet Independence cheers thee with her smile,
> And Fancy strews thy moorland with her flowers;
> And dost thou blame the impartial will of heaven,
> Untaught of life the good and ill to scan;
> To thee the Muse's choicest wreath is given,
> To thee the genuine dignity of man.
> Then to the want of worldly gear resigned,
> Be grateful for the wealth of thy exhaustless mind."

Mr. Addington's mind was evidently not "exhaustless" like the poet's, whom he congratulates, in the way of verse, and probably Burns, if put to it, would have preferred his own estate to that of the writer of these heartless lines. "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and fed," was never said with more callous cynicism. Cowper, who was in no special need, got a pension of three hundred a year a little while later. What would not that, or the half of it, have been to Burns! But at all events he need not have been congratulated

upon a poverty which it was so easy to relieve. Such compliments bear a wonderful resemblance to insults.

He returned to Edinburgh in the following autumn: but his day was over. Though he remained there five or six months, he seems to have seen no more fine company. He was perhaps more at home on the lower level, which yet was a higher level than that upon which he was born. It was during this time that he indulged in the sentimental flirtation which produced his letters to Clarinda, a foolish episode in a not very wise life. There was a great deal of nonsense, no doubt, both written and said; but then love-letters are always nonsense to impartial lookers on, and the general style of composition was very different then from now. Burns was always somewhat high-flown, partly from his natural temper, partly from his peasant breeding; but there can be little doubt that there was genuine passion as well as a great deal of artificial sentiment in this strange chapter of his life. The man who wrote—

> "Had we never loved so kindly,
> Had we never loved so blindly,
> Never met and never parted,
> We had ne'er been broken-hearted,"

must have meant what he said. But then he had the faculty, not exclusively possessed by poets, of being quite sincere and quite impassioned in two cases at the same time.

He left Edinburgh finally in the beginning of 1788, having passed two winters there, one of them

in the full heyday of popularity, the other in the cold shade. With Burns, as with most other people, the permanent tenor of circumstances prevailed, and after the moment of triumph, he had to fall back upon his natural friends. That these natural friends were men of some education, ought to have been a gain to him; that it was not so was probably due to the very principle that brought them together, a love of the coarsest convivial pleasures. He speaks somewhere, in a moment of sober sadness, of "that savage hospitality which kicks a man down with strong liquors." Still it would be hard to blame the jovial schoolmasters for the waste of possibility and character which his second winter in Edinburgh seems to have involved. In all such miserable concatenations of circumstance we are too apt to blame the secondary personages involved, the "bad company" which "leads away" the individual in whom we are interested. But this is poor philosophy. No man is led away whose will is against going, and it is fit that each should bear his own burden. His poetry had produced him a little fortune of about (the authorities agree in saying) £500, of which he gave £180 to his brother Gilbert to enable him to go on with his farm, and apparently to form a sort of provision for their mother. This money, "the consolation of a few solid guineas," seems to have been all his Edinburgh experiences brought him. But for this "I could almost lament," he says, "the time that a momentary acquaintance with wealth and splendour put me so much out of conceit with the sworn companions of

my road through life, insignificance and poverty." There can be little doubt that a sense of failure and downfall, and bitter perception that his social success was momentary, and that no real change had happened in his life, was in his mind ever after. And he had derived no advantage to counterbalance this from the advices and comments of those elegant critics who were supposed to be the dispensers of fame. It is curious, indeed, to observe the similarity of his experience and that of Cowper in respect to the criticisms and emendations to which their poetry was subject. At one of the country houses which Burns visited after his Edinburgh sojourn, he was asked "whether the Edinburgh literati had mended his poems by their criticisms." "Sir," said he, "these gentlemen remind me of some spinners in my country, who spin their thread so fine that it is neither fit for weft nor woof." The reader will be amused by comparing with this epigrammatic summary of the criticism of the period Cowper's protest against it. It is needless to recall to him how unlike the two men and their works were; but in this respect they are at one. Cowper's much more decided and lengthy expression of indignation was called forth by an impertinence, the alteration of a line in his "Homer," by "some accidental reviser of the manuscript."

"I did not write the line that has been tampered with hastily or without due attention to the construction of it, and what appeared to me its only merit is in its present state entirely annihilated. I know that the ears of modern verse-writers are delicate to an excess, and their readers are troubled with the

same squeamishness as themselves, so that if a line does not run as smooth as quicksilver they are offended. A critic of the present day serves a poem as a cook serves a dead turkey, when she fastens the legs of it to a post and draws out all the sinews. For this we may thank Pope; but unless we could imitate him in the closeness and compactness of his expression, as well as in the smoothness of his numbers, we had better drop the imitation which serves no other purpose than to emasculate and weaken all we write. Give me a manly rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods that have nothing but their oily smoothness to recommend them.

"I have said thus much because I have just finished a much longer poem than the last, which our common friend will receive by the same messenger that has the charge of this letter. In that poem there are many lines which an ear so nice as the gentleman's who made the above-mentioned alteration would undoubtedly condemn, and yet (if I may be permitted to say it) they cannot be made smoother without being the worse for it. There is a roughness on the plum which nobody that understands fruit would rub off, though the plum would be much more polished without it. But, lest I tire you, I will only add that I wish you to guard me from all such meddling, assuring you that I always write as smoothly as I can; but that I never did, never will, sacrifice the spirit or sense of a passage to the sound of it."

Thus the two great revolutionaries made their protest. The one, with wonderful spirit and vigour for so gentle a man, in words; the other with a laugh, a *mot* only, but a sturdy disregard of all the criticisms of this kind to which he was subjected, and all the counsels founded upon these criticisms, which is more telling than verbal remonstrance. Before we quit this subject, we may note, what is a very pleasant fact to meet with, that Cowper and Burns, though

they never met, had at least encountered each other in the spirit, in their poems, and with mutual understanding and appreciation. "I have read Burns's poems," Cowper writes to his friend Mr. Rose, who seems to have sent them to him, "and have read them twice; and though they be written in a language that is new to me, and many of them on subjects much inferior to the author's ability, I think them on the whole a very extraordinary production. He is, I believe, the only poet these kingdoms have produced in a low rank of life since Shakspeare (I should rather say since Prior), who need not be indebted for any part of his praise to a charitable consideration of his origin and the disadvantages under which he has laboured. It will be a pity if he should not hereafter divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English, in which he appears perfectly qualified to excel."

This last objection was of course entirely reasonable from Cowper's point of view, though impracticable from that of Burns; but the compliment paid to him is as high as any one could desire. Burns, on the other hand, generally carried Cowper's "Task" in his pocket, and "took it out when he found himself in a lonely road, or in a brewhouse, where he had to wait sometimes to 'gauge the browst.' He enriched the margins of the copy he used with notes critical and commendatory, and from the number of the marks and the frequency of the praise, it appears that the English bard was a great favourite." "Is not the

'Task' a glorious poem?" he says to Mr. Dunlop. "The religion of the 'Task,' bating a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the religion of God and Nature, the religion that exalts, that ennobles, man."

It is scarcely necessary for our purpose to dwell on the after-part of Burns's life in detail. He returned to Ayrshire after the disappointments of Edinburgh, and married his bonnie Jean—an act for which he apologised anxiously to all his correspondents, but to which he seems to have been bound in honour and also in love: for he loved her at least as well as any of the other objects of his roving affections. To speculate upon the influence that a wife of higher class and stronger principle might have had upon him is entirely vain. The instances are very few in which a good wife, or anything else, has had power enough to turn a man from dissipation when it has got full hold of him; and he was still a ploughman, full of the pride, the brag, the defiance which, far more than natural roughness of manners, disgust and repel the more delicately bred. He would probably have broken the woman's heart who had been dazzled by his poetry and eloquence, and liked his home not more but less for her superiority. There can, we think, be little doubt indeed, however injurious to a woman's pride it may be to say it, that a cultivated wife, or one who shares his intellectual interests, is by no means necessary to the happiness of a man of genius. The old-fashioned institution of a good, simple, worshipping woman, tolerant and uncritical, is perhaps better for him—or,

at least, he is pretty sure to think so: an opinion in which the great mass of men who have no genius will agree. Burns, after his marriage, settled at Ellisland, near Dumfries; a beautiful situation, but, it is said, indifferent land. "You have chosen like a poet, not like a farmer," some one is reported to have said to him; yet he must, one would suppose, have been able to judge, and he carefully records the opinion of an old farmer whom he took with him to inspect the place. It turned out badly, however, whether because the land was bad, or the farmer's mind not sufficiently given to it; and he applied to be appointed to active service in the Excise, his commission for which had been given him some time before. It was an occupation which involved much moving about, and a considerable amount of adventure, and would not seem to have been unpleasing to him. One of the incidents of his life, which led to a very foolish act and some trouble, will show the exciting character of the work at this stormy period. "A suspicious-looking brig" appeared in the Solway, and Burns and his fellow-officers boarded and took her, an exploit which must have set the poet's pulses in motion. He bought the guns with which the vessel was furnished, and sent them "with a letter to the French Legislative Assembly, requesting them to accept the present as a mark of his admiration and sympathy." Robert Burns, poet, to the French nation! The braggadocio was sublime; but an occupation in which such little incidents occurred could not be altogether disagreeable to a nature craving excitement.

Of course, this foolish offering was stopped, and the sender got into trouble enough to oblige him to write an almost abject letter to Mr. Graham of Fintry, appealing to him as a husband and father to save him from dismissal. This is a very sad production; and to hear him describing the accusations against him as "the dark insinuations of hellish groundless envy," is not less sad. The wild excitement raised by the French Revolution excuses, no doubt, a great deal of this folly; and we cannot be surprised that Burns, with his bitter sense of his own failure to keep his footing among the great (strangest of all contradictions of the theory of equality—for why should he have cared more about the society of dukes and duchesses if they were no better than ploughmen and milkmaids?), should have felt with double force the fire of the excitement which turned the wisest heads. But there is something which wounds us in the feverish and ostentatious folly of revolutionary sympathy, conjoined with the equally feverish hysterical protest of "devout attachment" to the British constitution, when his conduct was called in question. No doubt it was "thae moving things ca'd wife and weans" which prompted his alarm; but we should be glad to have heard less of them in such conjunctures.

Before this last stage, however, three years had passed at the farm of Ellisland, in which much poetry was written. He had engaged heart and soul in the collection of songs for Johnson's "Scots Musical Museum" before he left Edinburgh. Some years later

he took the same warm and eager interest in a similar collection set on foot by Thomson. For these two publications he wrote a large number of songs of differing degrees of merit, for which he proudly refused all remuneration. Two purely poetical scenes, of which his wife gives an account, instances of the way in which his subject possessed him, as well as, in one case, of the profound emotion out of which utterance came, are to be found in the story of this later period. In the beginning of the October of 1789, Burns had been very merry. He had written "Willie brew'd a peck o' maut," of which Principal Shairp, with somewhat comic gravity, says, "If bacchanalian songs are to be written at all, this certainly must be pronounced 'the king amang them a';'" but as the month drew near a melancholy anniversary, the death of that Highland Mary whom we know so little of, and who had in reality so much less share in his life than many another, he was observed by his wife "to grow sad about something, and to wander solitary on the banks of the Nith, and about his farmyard, in the extremest agitation of mind nearly the whole night. He screened himself on the lee-side of a corn-stack from the cutting edge of the night wind, and lingered till approaching dawn wiped out the stars one by one." When at last his anxious wife (who, let us hope, was not aware what anniversary it was) persuaded him to come in, he sat down and put upon paper his visionary sorrow, in verses so pathetic, that no critic has ever ventured to reckon them otherwise than among the most beautiful that Burns ever wrote :—

"Thou lingering star, with less'ning ray,
That lov'st to greet the early morn,
Again thou usher'st in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.
O Mary! dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?"

It is of the nature of a poet, and even had he not been a poet, it was of the nature of Burns, to feel everything that affected him with as much fervour and force as if nothing had ever affected him before. The other side of his inspiration affords an equally characteristic scene. Burns had recommended to Captain Grose, the antiquary, to include old Alloway Kirk in the sketches he was making for publication. The visitor suggested that Burns should write a poem to accompany the sketch, and the seed fell into good ground.

"The poem"—we quote from Principal Shairp, who is the last to tell the tale—"was the work of one day, of which Mrs. Burns retained a vivid recollection. Her husband had spent the most part of the day by the river-side, and in the afternoon she joined him with her two children. He was busily engaged 'crooning to himsel';' and Mrs. Burns, perceiving that her presence was an interruption, loitered behind with her little ones among the broom. Her attention was presently attracted by the strange and wild gesticulations of the bard, who was now seen at some distance. He was reciting very loud, and with tears rolling down his cheeks, the animated verses which he had just conceived:—

"Now, Tam, O Tam! had thae been queans,
A' plump and strappin' in their teens."

"I wish ye had seen him," said his wife, "he was in such ecstasy that the tears were happing down his cheeks. . . . The poet having committed the verses to writing on the top of his sod-dyke above the water, came into the house and read them immediately in high triumph at the fireside." In this sudden heat of impulse one of his greatest and most sustained efforts was produced. He had neither "thrown off barbarism," nor prepared himself for the composition of something great by a study of all the best models, the stories of the Greek and Latin mythology, and the events of modern history, as his advisers had urged upon him. But here, in a moment, written on the top of his sod-dyke, and read hot from his glowing mind by his fireside half-an-hour after, came something which no critic could mend—which critics indeed, in the exercise of a wise discretion, have never attempted to do anything but praise.

Burns was about three years in Ellisland, and when he gave up this last unfortunate essay in farming, removed to Dumfries, and henceforth confined himself to his work of Excise officer. His whole life is recorded in brief sums of time. Two years here, three there, five in Dumfries, which was the last and saddest chapter of all. He had left all the little money his poems brought him in the cold soil of Ellisland, and henceforward had nothing but his small salary as an Exciseman (fifty pounds a year, he repeatedly says, seventy, we are told, when in active service)

to live upon. For his songs he proudly refused to take any payment, and he appears to have been taken at his word by everybody concerned. No other edition of his collected works seems to have been called for, notwithstanding the universal enthusiasm they had called forth; so that the five hundred pounds which he brought from Edinburgh represented all that his genius did for him in this way. And of that he got little good. Many a hard word has been said about the inferior post in which Scotland permitted her greatest poet to earn his children's bread and to die: but had his friends been steadfast enough to push him onward to a better grade, there was less harm than has been supposed in the Excise. This seems to have been his own ambition, and would have contented him fully; but perhaps his foolish exuberances in the way of politics, his toasts instead of Pitt "to a better man George Washington," his present of guns to the French Convention, and other such unnecessary and undignified demonstrations of wounded pride and revolt, made his advancement impossible. There is little doubt that he was, as he says, "devoutly attached to the British Constitution," and as loyal as there was need to be. But he was an injured (he thought) and disappointed man, injured by being poor and a poet, and by the received fictions of social life, which made dukes and earls more great than he. It is impossible to doubt that he meant no more than this—and probably he would have said much less, but for the excitement of all those wild assemblies in which the rude wits of the countryside drew the poet out for

their own entertainment, and led him by their applauses and incitements to wilder and wilder rashness of speech. The foolish epigrams and broken verses which were born of this period (as well as many most beautiful and touching poems) are the mere poetic froth of a harassed and perturbed mind, and as such should be swept altogether out of recollection. It is not thus that we desire to take leave of Burns.

Fortunately he never attempted any tragedy, as his cultivated advisers had suggested: but it is said that he had thought of a subject for a drama, to be called "Rob M'Quechan's Elshin." This was to be founded upon a popular legend of Robert Bruce. That hero, according to the story, when defeated on the water of Cairn, had the heel of his boot loosened in his flight, and appealed to Robert M'Quechan to fix it—who to make sure ran his awl (or elshin) nine inches up the king's heel. This does not seem a very promising subject for a dramatic poem, and Burns fortunately never went farther than to mention the notion to his friends. His only attempt at dramatic composition was the "Jolly Beggars," about which a great many critics have expressed unbounded enthusiasm. We[1] are unable to join in these universal plaudits, and

[1] There must always be, we presume, however age and experience may modify nature, a certain inability on the part of a woman to appreciate the more riotous forms of mirth, and that robust freedom in morals which bolder minds admire. It is a disability which nothing can abolish, and we hasten to forestal criticism by avowing it. In such matters the reader will judge for himself how much our opinion is worth.

we believe that nowadays few enthusiasts for Burns care to do more than repeat the conventional praises of this wild fragment. Its vigour is unquestionable, but there is little constructive power, and only the most primitive daubs of character. M. Taine considers it the *chef-d'œuvre* of the poet, and devotes several pages to the discussion of its sentiments and personages. "J'espère que voilà du style franc, et que le poete n'est pas petite bouche," he says; but these qualities by themselves, however valuable, do not make poetical merit. In this particular, vicious sentiment need not tell more than virtuous, in our opinion, and the confined atmosphere of "Poosie Nansie's," is to ourselves as much inferior in art as it is in wholesomeness to the country freshness which is Burns's true atmosphere. His great effort in narrative poetry, "Tam o' Shanter," is more worthy, we think, of the universal praise bestowed upon it, though we agree to a large extent in Mr. Carlyle's less elevated estimate. In neither of these poems is the heart appealed to at all, nor any but the lower faculties of the imagination. Tam indeed, lingering in the alehouse, putting off as long as possible his severance from its delights, but when once fairly started, retaining enough of the warmth within him to present a courageous, muddled, humorous front to fate, afraid of nothing,—

> "Whiles holding fast his gude blue bonnet,
> Whiles crooning ower some auld Scots sonnet,"

is as luminous a picture as could be of the Scottish

peasant as distinguished from others of his kind, with his touch of rude poetic possibility, and the lurking fun which is never altogether absent from his musings. Sancho Panza would have seen no vision in Alloway Kirk, though he would have been as reluctant to leave his inn, and would have carried as many bottles under his belt as any man. But we cannot pretend to be impressed by the witches' dance, even though Sir Walter Scott answers for it that "it is at once ludicrous and horrible." The horror is the merest artifice, and we do not in reality care a straw for accessories so manifestly theatrical as the "coffins" standing "round like open presses," and the dissecting-room furniture on the tables; a comparison, for instance, with Goethe's weird assembly of the same kind will show at once the inferiority of the picture. Faust's backward retreat of terror and disgust when he sees "a little red mouse" leap from the mouth of his pretty partner is such a touch of diabolical genius as Burns has no pretension to equal. But on the other hand, Tam is entirely out of the possibilities of the great German. His round-eyed wonder, the warmth of the whisky in him, the humour of his muddle-headed spectatorship, not in the least impressed by this "horror," which the critics have discovered, is in its way unapproachable. We can imagine him laughing under his breath as he spurs the faithful Meg along the darkling road with all that wild train at his heels. In his tipsiness and pawky simplicity and sense of the real underneath the imaginative, he is never a bit afraid, nor does the poet represent him as being so.

"Tam kend what was what fu' brawly," and cared no more for "Auld Nick in shape of beast" than Cuvier did. This we think entirely deprives the poem of that hold upon the imagination which the supernatural, seriously intended, ought always to possess. But Burns, who wrote it with tears of mirth "happing down his cheeks," meant nothing but fun, or we are greatly mistaken, and fully attained all the effect he aimed at.

Several of his most beautiful songs were the product of these last years, along with a great many others which were little worthy of his great name, and which it seems a pity to preserve at all. "John Anderson, my jo" is, however, fine enough for the severest critic. Many a glowing image of youthful love he has left us, the best of them as delicate and pure in their passion as ever lyrics were; and here the circle of fervid verse is completed by the most perfect utterance of old and faithful affection.

"John Anderson, my jo, John,
  We clamb the hill thegither;
And mony a canty day, John,
  We've had wi' ane anither:
Now we maun totter down, John,
  But hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
  John Anderson, my jo."

The end of most lives is sad: either the speed of the current as it approaches the fall conveys a sense of tragic haste and desperation such as are inseparable from our ideas of a sudden ending, or the stagnation

of old age waiting for its release, appals and chills our hearts. In either sense the concluding chapter is sad. In Burns's case it was doubly so: for the miserable feeling of a life thrown away and wasted, adds to the almost intolerable pang with which we see a man in the fulness of his powers swept along, dissatisfied, embittered, disappointed, out of the world, which he still might have been so capable of serving. Everything in those last years suggests the image of a wild torrent, flowing quicker every moment towards the precipice over which it must disappear in clouds of angry foam. He vindicated his better nature only by the wretchedness which overwhelmed him at every moment of thought, a wretchedness from which he was glad to escape into the continual excitement of dissipations quite unworthy of him. He had many excuses—his life of constant movement, riding over ten parishes, with now and then an encounter with smugglers, or such an adventure as that which made him master of the guns of the smugglers' brig—and the popularity he had attained among all the jovial spirits of the district—offered a hundred temptations. "From the castle to the cottage, every door flew open at his approach; and the old system of hospitality, then flourishing, rendered it difficult for the most soberly-inclined guest to rise from any man's board in the same trim that he sat down to it. The farmer, if Burns was seen passing, left his reapers and trotted by the side of Jenny Geddes (his mare) until he could persuade the bard that the day was hot enough to demand an extra libation. If he entered an inn at midnight, after all

the inmates were in bed, the news of his arrival circulated from the cellar to the garret; and ere ten minutes had elapsed the landlord and all his guests were assembled round the ingle, the largest punch-bowl was produced, and

"'Be ours to-night—who knows what comes to-morrow?'

was the language of every eye in the circle that welcomed him. The highest gentry of the neighbourhood, when bent on special merriment, did not think the occasion complete unless the wit and eloquence of Burns were called in to enliven their carousals."

This latter class failed him, however, at the end. We do not pretend to believe that there were any qualities in the Dumfriesshire gentry which would have made their notice an instrument of salvation to the poet; but so far as they were of use in keeping him to decorum they failed him at his greatest need. Not that this was to be wondered at. A man who, after dinner, was capable of insulting rudeness to a lady in her own drawing-room, was a dangerous acquaintance, and even his best friends shrank from the risk. And a man who openly committed himself by approval of revolutionary sentiments, by sympathy with rebels against the English crown, and adversaries to it, could scarcely hope for advancement in the Government service. Thus the clouds closed in around him, and there seemed no opening from whence succour would come.

He died at thirty-seven. Had he died ten years

earlier his reputation would scarcely have been less, and he would have escaped a great deal of misery; but it is not for us to reckon with Providence. Even if we hesitate to accept Mr. Carlyle's conclusion that he was the greatest man of his generation, the one most fit to rule and command, we may nevertheless allow that he was by far the greatest poet. Cowper is placed beside him in the bead-roll because, so distant as they were from each other, they both helped—or rather, they wrought between them—the permanent enfranchisement of poetry, her right to see things as they were, and to express herself as she pleased, in whatsoever manner liked her, reserving her power to touch the innermost soul, whether she went back to lift the mantle of Milton, or picked up a homely medium of utterance on the roadside. No harp, no lute was longer necessary. We got rid of the antique attendance of "the Muse." A new life and a new freedom came into the language, and the bondage of Pope, and precedent, and the best models, was loosed from the soul. Burns died in 1796—Cowper not till 1800. It would be hard to say which life was most tried, most unfortunate, most sad. Had either man—he who stormed his life out in mid-career, or he who drank out all the dregs of mournful age—known how to rule his own spirit, how different might have been the record! But Cowper had the excuse of mental disease: whereas no apology can be made for Burns, except that which pity makes for the victim of a defective will in all circumstances. This fatal deficiency equalises all human qualities, and

makes the man of genius, alas! only a little more luckless, not better, than the veriest fool.

ROBERT BURNS, Born 1759; Died 1796.

Poems published in Kilmarnock, 1786.
2d Edition in Edinburgh, with additions, 1787.
3d Edition, with Tam O'Shanter, etc., 1793.
4th ,, ,, ,, 1794.
Edition published after his death by Dr. Currie, with letters, 1800.

CHAPTER III.

LITERATURE IN SCOTLAND BEFORE BURNS.

The Edinburgh of Burns's day is a somewhat difficult study for the inquirer. It is represented by a number of notable persons, of whom there are, however, pictures so different that we scarcely know which to adopt. All the biographers of Burns represent him as seduced from the calm delights of a refined society, into the jovial undercurrent of tavern life, where third-rate men and vulgar joys swept him away out of a better career. And when we turn on one hand to the books and periodicals of the time, to the languishing periods of the "Man of Feeling," and the weak Addison-and-water of the *Mirror* and the *Lounger*, this view of the situation has a certain support. But on the other hand Sir Walter Scott, and later, Lord Cockburn in his "Recollections," unfold before us a society so outspoken and so homely, so tolerant of the easier vices, so ready to forgive everything that had fun and spirit involved in it, that we are bewildered and cannot tell what to think. Could Nicol and Carmichael and the Crochallan Club, to which several of Burns's biographers attribute all his

dissipations, have been more riotous and merry than that assembly, periodical and unchanging, in which Councillor Pleydell was found at high jinks by Colonel Mannering? But then the "Man of Feeling" would have been as much out of place in such an assembly as the grave English soldier himself, who did not know what to make of it. Henry Mackenzie, the author of this book, was the representative of Edinburgh at that moment in the field of *belles lettres.* He was a poet after his kind; he had written tragedies, he was the author of the sentimental romance of the period, and he was also its favourite critic and essayist. Most curious is the picture he presents to us. Never was Edinburgh more individual, never perhaps was she so jovial. The town was full of remarkable men, whose names were known all over the world—and of scarcely less remarkable women, whose *bon mots,* and whose daring opinions and ways, were known at least over all Edinburgh. Lord Cockburn affords half-a-dozen sketches of old ladies, old in his time, who must have been in full bloom in the days of Burns, whose strong and racy individuality it would be hard to match anywhere. A more racy or less mim-mouthed society could scarcely be.

Perhaps the circles into which Burns fell, among men upon whom the gravity of age had stolen, the Robertsons and Blairs, the gentle blind poet Blacklock, so fluent in verse, with his little band of pupils—and even Dugald Stewart himself, the most suave of professors, a man who was good

and gentle by temperament, and in whose presence we feel sure no riot could have been possible—had more seriousness, if not more culture than belonged to the strong and gay, and somewhat reckless and cynical humour of the Scotch capital. The latter indeed is the least Scotch of all his learned contemporaries. It is evident that he held an imposing position in Edinburgh. To enter his class was, as Lord Cockburn tells us, "the great era in the progress of young men's minds." Latterly his house was filled with pupils from more courtly circles; English youths with great names and a great future, gazing with keen eyes and all the interest of novelty at the wonderful little metropolis, where intellectual interests were the chief occupation of men. Dugald Stewart, however, is far more like the ideal of an Oxford tutor than a Scotch professor, and good Scotsman as he was, has little of the characteristic national flavour of the time. But Henry Mackenzie has no national character at all—and the impression of Edinburgh which he leaves upon the reader's mind is curiously false and artificial. It would answer for "the Bath" or "the Wells," or any centre of provincial fashion and self-exhibition. The *Mirror* and the *Lounger* afford us no glimpses either of those alarming old ladies who spoke out their minds with such daring frankness and such broad Scotch, like that fine moralist, a clergyman's widow, who, at eighty, hearing how a lady's good fame had suffered from a prince's indiscretion, shook her shrivelled fist and cried out, "The damned villain!

does he kiss and tell?"—or of the witty lawyers, so little scrupulous in words, so keen and sharp of wit, respectful of no shams nor of much else—or even of the historians and philosophers who gave the town its seal of distinction. Those quaint and venerable figures in their old dining-rooms, or perambulating their favourite walk in the Meadows, under the shadow of old George Heriot's Hospital, never make the slightest appearance in the supposed accounts of contemporary manners, by which the *Lounger* hoped to claim a place beside the more famous weekly records of English society. All that we get from it is a misty glimpse of fashions and dissipations, like, though at a long distance, the society sketches of the *Spectator*, petty and provincial, and many times watered. Mackenzie was the first to give a really generous and discerning criticism of Burns, putting him at once in his right place as a poet, which is infinitely to his credit; but though he was the recognised exponent of literature and society at the time, he gives us not a single indication of any society into which it could have been worth the ploughman's while to appear at all.

This curious deficiency is scarcely comprehensible, unless from the ambition Mackenzie had to spread his *Lounger* beyond Edinburgh, and the sense that Scotland was still a barbarous and unknown country to the larger minds of English readers. When we remember that he actually adds a *glossary* to the "Address to a Mouse," quoted in his article on Burns, as

if that "good broad Scotch" which was spoken by so many of the best people in Edinburgh was unknown to the delicate ears of his hearers, we feel that elegant fiction can go no farther; it is as odd as any other affectation of the "*Precieuse*" period. "Even in Scotland the provincial dialect which Ramsay and he (Burns) have used is now read with a difficulty which greatly damps the pleasure of the reader," he says. The natural result from this is that Mackenzie's sketches, professedly of Scotland, are as little like Scotland as they are like Germany. They are of no country under the sun. They are of that vague typical region invented by Addison, which is filled by examples of all the virtues and vices, and where a perpetual crusade against the fashion and its vagaries is the chief spur of existence. Marjory Mushroom comes to town; she has her head turned with new dresses and high *têtes* and feathers, is persuaded to paint, and meets a great many tempters to folly in the shape of fine ladies and fine gentlemen—and coming home again is wretched, and fills the heads of all the Misses Homespun with illegitimate longings. Or Mrs. Careful describes how, occupied like Virtue's self in teaching her little girls, she is interrupted by innumerable callers, who spoil her morning. Or it is the story of Eudocius and Clitander which edifies the reader; or Colonel Caustic, who is a weak imitation of Sir Roger de Coverley, represents chivalry and all the Graces, with a great many indignant and sarcastic remarks upon the inferiority of everything in the present to everything in the past. An Addison of Tunbridge Wells, doing all he can to ignore the fact

that his assemblies and plays are not the real resorts of fashion, but yet with no more difference in his tone than the heavier atmosphere of Kent necessitated, might have written just such moralities. Here and there, with a breath of regret, he owns, indeed, that Edinburgh as a fashionable centre is not the chief of cities. "There is a sort of classic privilege in the very names of the places in London which does not extend to those of Edinburgh," he says. "The Canongate is almost as long as the Strand, but it will not bear the comparison upon paper; and Black-friars Wynd can never vie with Drury Lane." The Canongate is one of the grandest old streets in Europe, and was still at that period, whatever its sanitary conditions may have been, the abode of the remnants of those great people for whom its stately houses were built, and it is amusing to hear that it is not to be compared to the Strand. This is very like Mrs. Hardcastle's speech in the play, when she asks, with regretful humility yet pride, How can any one have a manner who has never seen "the Pantheon, the Grotto Gardens, the Borough, and such places, where the nobility chiefly resort?"

Just so the Edinburgh critic sighs yet smiles, with an underlying consciousness that, after all, he is almost as fine a gentleman as those who flourished their canes in the Mall, or frequented the most classic of coffee-rooms. Yet those featureless and uncharacteristic fables were produced by Mackenzie and his coadjutors in the very heart cf that merry, noisy, somewhat rough, profane, and con-

vivial Edinburgh, which was, perhaps, the most individual of all local societies. They had their headquarters in Creech's shop, in the house once inhabited by Allan Ramsay, upon the brow of the hill, close to the spot once occupied by the old town cross, where in the afternoons all the town came out, to walk about the open space and listen to the bell-ringing, for want of a better entertainment; or rather to enjoy their jokes, which were more funny than refined, and their gossip, which was full of audacious freedom. To think that the "Man of Feeling" could have looked out daily upon this jovial crowd, and perhaps gone afterwards for his dish of tea to the close on the Castle Hill, where Mrs. Cockburn received Burns with enthusiasm, and where there were dances and junketings "nine couples on the floor" of the small drawing-room, and "the bairns vastly happy;" and many an old Scotch song and new anonymous ditty, in cunning imitation of the old, was made and sung—and yet have nothing but Mushrooms and Homespuns to talk about in his commentary on society! Perhaps he shook hands, on his way, with John Clerk of Eldin or Henry Erskine, broad Scots and broad jokers both, or rubbed shoulders with old Miss Suph Johnstone, the amazon of the day, whose song, "Eh! quo' the tod, it's a braw licht nicht," proves what her dialect was. He could not move a step, indeed, this elegant disciple of Addison and Rousseau, without having his ears offended with the vigorous vowels and gutturals, the daring wit, and audacious talk, of a community as strong as unrestrained, as profane and as convivial as ever made a

town merry; and yet he gives us a glossary of Burns, and sets before us a gallery of pastels, swains, and nymphs, and conventional rustics and fine ladies, as his contribution to the satirical and sentimental history of his time.

This is all the more curious that Henry Mackenzie was no impostor, but really knew society, and was himself an important figure, none better known in Edinburgh, where he lived to our own days, a highly respectable and respected townsman, bearing the romantic title of his principal work to his grave. "The Man of Feeling," which is a very mild dilution of the sentimentalism of the time, with a good deal of Sterne in it, and a good deal of Rousseau, is not without some prettiness of composition, and even occasional just remark. Perhaps it was a certain pride in the thought that Scotland had here produced an elegant moralist of her own to rival her richer and greater neighbour, who up to this time had been unquestionably in advance of her in this as in most other departments of literature, which gave to the work its unusual popularity. However it may pique our patriotism to say so, it is no doubt true that Scotland, like every junior partner in a great historical union, has always had a most lively jealousy of her wealthy sister, and delighted in nothing so much as in the ability to hold her own in all peaceful contests of arts or letters. While neither Burns nor Scott existed, Henry Mackenzie was always something: and perhaps it pleased the jocund little capital all the better that he stood up to the adversary on his own

ground, giving her a Lounger of her own in emulation of all the Spectators and Ramblers, than if he had struck out the fresh vein of her own humours and oddities, which was happily reserved for a more potent magician. There is nothing of what in these modern days of slang we call "bumptiousness" in the "Man of Feeling." He is too well-bred to throw down his glove to the potentates over the Border. He prefers, with plausible elegance, to prove that there is no manner of difference between them. In early youth, indeed, he was seduced into one or two attempts to copy the old Scotch ballad, that effort of industry being popular at the time. But his ballads have never been battled over, like Hardyknute and Sir Patrick Spens, and are very inferior productions —while the didactic verse, into which he flowed inevitably afterwards, is as full of reference to the ordinary subjects of "town," as if the poet had never issued from within the sound of Bow Bells. When he describes the houses of the great, it is a town mansion which is his model, with "giant knocker" and powdered footman; when he rhymes his harmless fable about Truth and Business, it is a cockney in "a neat-built country box"—

> "So near, that with an easy ride,
> A man may breakfast in Cheapside"—

who is his model of the latter quality. The fashionable auction where "Sir Lappet" hurries in his "papillots," chattering politics and bric-a-brac—

> "The Queen of Denmark—there's a figured bowl,
> The marquis writes me that the Tuesday's poll—

What gewgaw things! your glass, my lord: are these,
Oh miserably vulgar! not Chinese!"

and all the Laelios and Lamias, the city turtle, the dissipations of the great, are all imitations and antiquated imitations, the fashion taking some time to travel from London to Edinburgh. The "Man of Feeling" has to deal with peasants of romantic nature and the finest sentiments, and with unfortunates upon the streets, who are as delicate and refined as any princess, and whose betrayal into vice has every machination of villainy to excuse it, who are, indeed, only the more immaculate and interesting from having sinned. The benefactor and hero is a gentle youth, who lives but to do good, and be loved, and who, after an unfortunate interval of doubt as to the affections of the matchless maiden whom he has chosen, dies of the joy of hearing that she loves him! This is indeed a superfine hero, and everything he says and does is equally delicate and irreproachable. The "Man of the World" which followed, and which is equally fine, but much more objectionable, has a mixture of Richardson in his worst peculiarities, the hairbreadth escapes of Pamela, over and over repeated—and not always escapes: with an absence both of wit and nature which takes all possible right of existing from such detestable complications. Julia dé Roubigné is a poor little shadow from the other Julia of the Nouvelle Heloise. So sapless, imitative, and artificial were the productions which held the palm of literary achievement in the capital of Scotland, when Burns, eager, yet proud, distrustful, and

suspicious, holding himself on his guard like some herald, or bearer of a flag of truce in an enemy's country, appeared to the wonder and admiration, yet doubt and alarm, of the old sovereigns of literature. The honour that remains to the "Man of Feeling" is that he had discrimination and sense enough to give his word of praise, and that with no stinted hand, to the ploughman poet.

The other correct and regular poet of the time was Dr. Blacklock, who also, to his great credit, at once recognised and applauded the new light. His poetry is of the same smooth and characterless description, but his story is a touching one; he was blind from his infancy, but was so kindly guarded and served both by relations and friends that, though without means of his own, he acquired a classical education, or at least enough of it to qualify him for the Church of Scotland, not much more exacting then than was the Church of England, when she received Crabbe with nothing but a little Latin into her bosom. He got a living, but his parishioners were not satisfied with their blind pastor, and after an interval of discomfort he left them in the hands of a substitute, reserving some portion of the stipend to live upon, and with this came to Edinburgh, where he received into his house young men attending the University, and was himself received into the genial society of the place. He got a good and tender wife notwithstanding his blindness, and a great deal of that respect mingled with compassion, which a man, so heavily burdened in the way of life, almost invariably in-

spires, but which perhaps is always a half-humiliating sympathy. Poems with such titles as "Ode to Aurora on Melusa's Birthday," "Ode to a Young Gentleman bound for Guinea," etc., sufficiently indicate the character of his verses. In the short memoir which we have of him, written by Mackenzie, there are a great many special quotations made, and lines selected, to show that, notwithstanding his blindness, he was capable of describing nature. This, of course, must have been simply in imitation of the lavish colours, the purple evenings and rosy mornings of the poets; but there is a pathetic correctness in his enumeration of the yellow crocuses and purple hyacinths, which touches the heart. He was a good man, and, considering his infirmity, prosperous and fortunate. But the consciousness of this disability appears to have kept him somewhat sad, and his later life seems to have been touched with melancholy from a very natural cause. "Some of his later poems express a chagrin, though not of an ungentle sort, at the supposed failure of his imaginative powers; or," "the Man of Feeling" adds, "at the fastidiousness of modern times, which he despaired to please." Poor gentle poet!—his "Muse," his gift of "Song," had been the sole ground upon which he had risen into local reputation; and there are few more moving occasions for at least a sentimental sympathy. We feel with him, even if we smile at the hot but weak indignation with which he stigmatises the new standards—standards, alas! which he could never come up to, and which settled his fate.

"Such were his efforts, such his cold reward,
Whom once thy partial tongue pronounced a bard.
Excursive on the gentle gales of spring
He rov'd, while favour imp'd his timid wing,
Exhausted genius now no more inspires;
But mourns abortive hopes and faded fires.
The short-lived wreath, which once his temples graced,
Fades at the sickly breath of squeamish taste,
Whilst darker days his fainting flames immure
In cheerless gloom, and winter premature."

Again we say poor poet! He had as much right to call the new influences which condemned his old-fashioned rigid verse, "a squeamish taste," as they had to break up the foundations and scatter the waning honours of that lingering, feeble superstructure, which had been elongated like a house of cards upon the system of Pope. He showed his insight above any of the other tuneful brethren by recognising that his day was over, and his laurels incapable of supporting that "sickly breath." These discontented verses are the swansong of the ending age. "The Man of Feeling" was conscious, for his own part, of no such failure.

At the same time there existed in old Edinburgh, in the very region where flourished the *Mirror* and the *Lounger*, and all their far-fetched conventionalisms, a true and generous little concert of songs rising from various quarters, which handed on a better tradition, from Allan Ramsay, whose pastoral strain, if not without affectation, had rung true and clear, down to Burns. They were chiefly women, ladies of the best blood and breeding, who performed this

genial office, with little parade, and more enjoyment than fame. "The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spens," as Coleridge calls it, was, all authorities are now agreed in saying, an innocent forgery, and written by Lady Wardlaw, who was the author of several other mock-antique ballads which, however, were not mock poetry, but worthy the place they attained. Miss Jean Elliot produced one of the versions of the "Flowers of the Forest," Mrs. Cockburn another: while Lady Anne Lindsay gave us the exquisite and pathetic little romance of "Auld Robin Gray," a ballad so true to the soil, so pure and tender in sentiment, that its genuine truth and nature make all the artificial features of the surrounding literature look more false than ever—

> "Oh, lady nursed in pomp and pleasure,
> Where gat ye that heroic measure?"

How was it that art, so true yet so simple, could exist in so many obscure corners, while the false and bedizened artifice which took her place, sat in the high places, and was constituted the judge of everything? This is one of the curious circumstances in literary history which it is difficult to explain, except from the fact that the frost stiffens with a kind of desperation the moment before the south winds begin to blow, and the ice chains to melt away. Behind backs, out of the reach of the critics, Edinburgh no doubt laughed in her sleeve at the "Man of Feeling." But Scotland has always cherished such songs as these in her heart. They breathed about the country far and wide, and were known and sung long before they

were printed, the national genius for song having survived everything; and it was appropriate that through this homely channel the revival should come. What does Mr. Carlyle say: "The smallest cranny through which a great soul ever shone"? But when he said this, he forgot what we do not doubt he very well knows,[1] all that song has been to Scotland since that speech was made about the making of laws and the making of ballads. Song, or rather Songs: the word in the plural has perhaps a somewhat different meaning, not that of a melody only, which might please the hearers almost as much if Do-re-mi were the syllables employed to give it utterance, but an art which was poetry, at least as much as music, and into which thousands entered with enjoyment for the sake chiefly of the beautiful "words." This distinction is perhaps worth the consideration of the student. Ballads like "Auld Robin Gray," songs like the "Flowers of the Forest," were a great deal more than music; the simple old tune "set" to each was little more than the breath which carried the poetry into many a melting heart. This mingled faculty, half one art, half the other, was never extinguished, and always independent of the verse-maker's elaborate rules. It was the breath of life in old Scotland. When the "Man of Feeling" reigned in artificial and tottering state, these collections of songs, unnoted messengers, flew about the country to which they were indigenous, keeping up in it a soul of fresh

[1] These words were written before the loss of Scotland's last great writer, which we have now to lament.

and natural sentiment when there was little else to do so—a fact which made it more appropriate than any one has cared to acknowledge that the new power in literature in the north, the new poet, should take by nature to this national medium, the art his country has always loved.

HENRY MACKENZIE, the Man of Feeling, born 1745; died 1831; published his chief work 1771.

THOMAS BLACKLOCK, born 1721; died 1791; published volume of poems 1746.

CHAPTER IV.

GEORGE CRABBE.

At the very time when the two unconscious revolutionaries who have occupied our time so long were loosing the bands and opening the prison gates of poetry, and, with her, of literature in general, there was happening at the same moment one of those curious returns upon old customs, which so often give a whimsical variety to a great movement. It would be amiss to say that Crabbe had no part in the new revolution. He whose themes are so severely chosen from annals unknown to the Graces, and whose stern submission to fact deepened and strengthened what we may call the imaginative realism of his great contemporaries, had his full part in the destruction of those attenuated canons of literary art, which were no longer capable of restraining the impulse of the new life; but nothing could be more entirely in accordance with all the conventional laws of a poet's struggle, and final acceptance by the world, than the early facts of his history. All that was ever written of Grub Street comes true in his tale of misery and aspiration. He is at his outset the

very poet of Hogarth, the philosophical vagabond of Goldsmith, the poor author whose image it is so hard to dissociate even from the hard-working and well-to-do literature of to-day. While Cowper was roaming gently and legitimately, yet, so far as contemporary opinion went, wildly enough by all the windings of the Ouse, patronless, and indifferent to everything but the diversion of his own distracted spirit; and Burns bringing out through a local printer, and for local gratification, his first modest volume—Crabbe was starving in London, writing letter after letter to one magnate after another, in hopes of being picked up out of his garret, and on the strength of approbation from some acknowledged authority, finding himself at last on the way to fame. There could not be a more curious difference—all the more as Johnson and his supporters had thrown cold water on Grub Street, and all but pulled down the great Dagon of patronage. New ideas, however, travel slowly, and perhaps the son of the rough Suffolk "Saltmaster," half-official, half-fisherman, was not aware that the patron, as a literary institution, had got his deathblow. To him London was still a place where the streets were paved with gold—where genius was understood, and poetry a sort of "Open Sesame" to every noble door. The contrast is extraordinary—and it becomes all the more marked from the fact that Crabbe was one of the few with whom the obsolete institution of literary patronage was entirely successful. He found the man, noble and generous,

and open-hearted—noble, that is in heart and spirit, though not in rank—who is the ideal patron of whom every poet dreams: and whose image has always made it possible for visionary men to believe in and struggle after the favour of the great, hoping always to find under the graceful drapery of a title, that all-feeling, all-comprehending being, whose patronage will be an honour, and his help something like the help of an angel—"Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground encumbers him with help?" Johnson had asked so long before as the period of Crabbe's birth; but the country lad who came to London with his poems a hundred years ago, half educated, and completely inexperienced, retained the old notions that belonged to a previous generation, and never seems to have doubted that he would find some one to stand between him and want—nay, to open the way for him to success and fame. And the wonderful thing was that he succeeded and found what he sought.

George Crabbe was born in the seafaring village of Aldborough, on the Suffolk coast, in the year 1754. He was thus five years older than Burns. Except that he was an English villager with a touch of the sea in everything about him, his breeding was not much dissimilar from that of Burns, with the great difference, however, that the Scots parents' profound piety and anxious appreciation of education were wanting in the pro-

bably much more plentiful and comfortable home of the revenue officer. These were the days when salt was taxed, and Crabbe's father was the collector of the duties,—with a charge of warehouses it would appear,—probably custom-house warehouses, in which he made his sons fill up their idle time; but he was a man of violent temper and not of exemplary habits. Crabbe's education was of the smallest. When he was fourteen his professional training as a doctor, the trade (for it would be absurd to call it a profession) selected for him, began, and he entered upon life as an apprentice to a country surgeon. It is a curious illustration of the loose training of those days, that Crabbe set up for himself as a doctor in Aldborough at the age of two or three and twenty, with scarcely any further training in his profession than that he had received from the country surgeon, whose apprentice he had been. He was in London for a few months professedly attending the hospitals, and he was for some time assistant to an apothecary—but this was all his education came to. Probably in that sharp sea air among those salt-marshes, and in days so much less occupied with sanitary considerations than our own, disease was more straightforward and simple than now—otherwise there is something appalling in the idea that the lives of a village might be committed to the charge of a youth so imperfectly trained.

He did not like his profession, however, nor did it like him—and he was in love, and a poet. No

doubt, though he was always a modest and somewhat matter-of-fact man, he felt in himself many faculties to which the dreary village life afforded no development—and dreams of some one who would appreciate and understand him, and of a larger existence in which his higher qualities would have scope, stirred within him. His home was mean and uncongenial, his Sarah hopelessly removed from him so long as he was without the means of maintaining her, and nothing but the angry sea, the oozing marshes, the dull peat bog and stubbly common, and low sky hanging over the flat country, composed his surroundings. "With the best verses he could write, and with very little more, he quitted the place of his birth, not without the most serious apprehensions of the consequences of such a step—apprehensions which were conquered, and barely conquered, by the more certain evil of the prospect before him, should he remain where he was." When we add that the "very little more" which enabled the poor young surgeon to make this prodigious venture, was five pounds borrowed from, or rather given by, a local magnate, Mr. Dudley North, the desperation of the project will be all the more apparent. He obtained this by writing to Mr. North, with whom he does not seem to have had any prior acquaintance. His passage to London, though only in a sloop sailing from a neighbouring little seaport, in which he lived with the sailors, cost him a considerable part of the sum—and he arrived in London with a "box of clothes, a small case of

surgical instruments, and three pounds"—no friends nor any resource by which he could help himself, and nothing but the poems in his pocket upon which to build his forlorn hope. He lived at first in a hairdresser's shop, was kindly patronised by a linen-draper in Cornhill, and spent his evenings at "a small coffee-house near the Exchange," where he was so fortunate as to meet respectable and intelligent companions. But even such humble delights were not long to be kept up upon nothing. The first thing he did was to offer his poems for publication. "Sylvanus Urban" rejected them with good-humoured contempt. Then he began to write letters, which, had he not been a poet, could be called nothing but begging-letters, to one great personage after another. Lord North, the Prime Minister, took no notice of his application, neither did Lord Shelburne. Thurlow, to whom he enclosed some of his verses, returned a cold note, regretting that he had no time to read poetry. We do not know whether Prime Ministers and Lord Chancellors nowadays have similar applications made to them; but the impartial reader will feel almost an equal pity for the high functionaries who were thus at the mercy of every rhymester. Crabbe was received graciously at their tables in after years, and made the inevitable reflections on the subject—but our wonder at the boldness of the young poet is greater, we fear, than our indignation with the great men who did not take him up. Granting, however, that his possession of the poetic gift gave him a claim upon

the rulers of the country, the bitterness of his repeated disappointment is very real. To Lord Shelburne he sends a letter, half in verse, half in prose, "Ah, Shelburne, blest with all that's good or great," cries the poor poet:

> "Oh hear the Virtue thou reverest plead ;
> She'll swell thy breast, and there applaud the deed.
> She bids thy thoughts one hour from greatness stray,
> And leads thee on to fame a shorter way ;
> Where, if no withering laurel's thy reward
> There's shouting Conscience, and a grateful Bard ;
> A bard untrained in all but misery's school,
> Who never bribed a knave or praised a fool ;—
> 'Tis Glory prompts, and as thou read'st attend,
> She dictates pity, and becomes my friend ;
> She bids each cold and dull reflection flee,
> And yields her Shelburne to distress and me ! "

"My lord," he adds, "I now turn to your lordship, and entreat to be heard. I am ignorant what to ask, but feel forcibly my wants—patronage and bread. I know no other claim on your lordship than my necessities, unless my Muse, and she has, I am afraid, as few charms."

In the depths of private life it happens to us all to receive letters scarcely less touching, and quite as unauthorised ; but it is to be feared that we show very little respect for their eloquence. To meet with the model of such productions in the writing of a poet who has since found a place in the records of fame, is curious enough. The fashion was dying down to a low level even then, but had not quite gone. Lord Shelburne took no notice of this effusion, but Crabbe,

when years after he was the guest of the statesman whose favour he had sought in vain, recalled, not unkindly, the different conditions in which he waited at those same doors with his heart beating, looking for a reply that never came. His journal of this anxious period of his life is wonderfully natural and affecting. It is addressed to Mira, which was the poetical of plain Sarah, his betrothed; but when disappointment and trouble overwhelm him, when he has "but sixpence-farthing in the world," and so many melancholy appeals flying about which the great people will take no notice of, it is with a touching return to fact and nature that he cries, "Oh, Sally, how I want you!" from the bottom of his heart.

The London in which Crabbe thus starved and struggled was a more picturesque, if not so comfortable, London than the one we are familiar with. He gives his Mira a description of the Gordon riots which took place during the summer. "In my way I met a resolute band of vile-looking fellows, ragged, dirty, and insolent, armed with clubs, going to join their companions." He stands and looks on while Newgate is pulled to pieces, and "never saw anything so dreadful." When the governor's house was reduced to "a mere shell of brickwork, they kept a store of flame there for other purposes; it became red-hot, and the doors and windows appeared like the entrances to so many volcanoes. But I must not omit" (he adds) "what struck me most. About ten or twelve of the mob getting to the top of the debtors' prison, whilst it was burning, to halloo, they appeared rolled in black smoke

mixed with sudden bursts of fire, like Milton's infernals." Through these lurid gleams he sees the prisoners "conducted through the streets in their chains." Pleasanter are the records of his Sunday experiences, when he goes to church, and sends the sermon to refresh his reader. "As I'm afraid my ever dearest Mira has not a preacher so affecting as my worthy rector, I shall not scruple to give his morning discourse in the way I have abstracted those before." Thus the anxious maiden in Suffolk has a share in all he says or does; and though the absolute dependence of the young man upon hopes so chimerical as the patronage of statesmen for his "Muse" is very strange to us nowadays, yet his confidence, and tenderness, and piety, make a very pleasant picture—not too sad, since success comes at the end.

Dr. Johnson was still living, and the greatest authority in letters; but it does not seem to have occurred to Crabbe to appeal to the great autocrat. It is somewhat curious, indeed, to find in Cowper, whose career began during the early reign of Johnson, and in Crabbe, who crossed that reign towards its end, so little recognition of the great Pope of Literature, who to our eyes dominates his age. Nothing can be more remarkable, however, than the blindness of contemporaries, and perhaps Johnson was too alarming for the new generation, never much disposed to acknowledge the masters of a former cycle. When he had exhausted all other resources young Crabbe addressed himself in his despair to Burke. He sent him a long letter, giving a narrative of his distressed condition and the

disappointment of all his hopes, in which several of his poems were enclosed. His situation was almost hopeless when he took his little packet to Burke's door. "I appeal to you, sir, as a good, and, let me add, a great man. I have no other pretensions to your favour but that I am an unhappy one," said the poor young adventurer. "Mr. Burke," says Crabbe's son and biographer, "was at this period (1781) engaged in the hottest turmoil of parliamentary opposition, and his own pecuniary circumstances were by no means very affluent; yet he gave instant attention to this letter and the verses it enclosed. He immediately appointed an hour for my father to call upon him at his house in London, and the short interview that ensued entirely and for ever changed the nature of his worldly fortunes. He was in the common phrase 'a made man' from that hour. He went into Mr. Burke's rooms a poor young adventurer, spurned by the opulent and rejected by the publishers, his last shilling gone, and all but his last hope with it; he came out virtually secure of almost all the good fortune that by successive steps fell to his lot; his genius acknowledged by one whose verdict could not be questioned; his character and manners approved by a noble and generous heart, whose benevolence knew no limits but its power."

The relations between patron and dependant cannot be called either wholesome or pleasant, and literature has little occasion to regret the change of system; still, there is something in this sudden deliverance which touches the heart more than any

mere bookselling. To go, poor and quivering with the keen shafts of anxiety, seeing no light around you, and no way of escape from your trouble, into some gracious presence, and in a moment—in the gleam of genial eyes, in the very tone of a voice—to feel yourself saved from all that wretchedness, and the doors of life softly rolled open before you: and in addition to all, a friend gained for life and for death, what sudden happiness could be like it? The young applicant had his poems and a stainless character; but, except these, scarce anything else—a little Latin, a very little medicine; no money, no friends, no connections; and Sally in the country (who is Mira on fine days when the sun is shining), gazing wistfully over the gloomy sea and the flat barren waste, for every post that came in and every sad letter. What a letter he must have written to her that evening! How he must have lingered on every feature of the noble patron, and every word he had uttered! To the country lad it was a great thing to have seen Burke at all; but to have won his smile and his favour, to have heard him say, "He has the mind and feelings of a gentleman," to have received the promise of his help, the immediate recognition of his friendship, what blessedness was this!

Crabbe was of the virtuous kind. He must have borne his evidences of modesty, honour, and manliness, and of a character which never would bring shame upon any one who befriended him, in his countenance. He was little more educated than Burns, and not half so eloquent or entrancing; yet how great

is the difference! Partly, no doubt, this difference was in the warm-hearted Irishman whose generosity was so ready and so kind. But Burke did not take his countryman Goldsmith in hand as he took Crabbe; there must be, on the other hand, a something in the protected which will respond to the efforts of the protector. Burns going off from the midst of the lords and ladies to a tavern in the wynds, where, in the wild talk and encounter of wags and wits, these lords and ladies were sometimes the subjects of the laughter—was a very different sort of being to protect and push forward from this gentle and good young fellow, who never was less than respectable and orderly, whatever he did—a man full of natural duty and submission, sure to do his patron credit. Why is it that every man of genius could not be as Crabbe was? Burke seems to have taken the young fellow from his city garret, from the lowliness of his sea-side village, into his own house, "domesticated him under his own roof, and treated him like a son." Alas! if Burns had got such a chance it is most likely some cloud of offence, some dropt decorum, or sharp touch of sarcasm, would have broken the bond within a week. In Crabbe's case the adoption of the poet and his interests by this generous protector, who had never seen him twenty-four hours before, was complete. Much has been said about literary jealousies and quarrels, but little about the helpful hand which many a man of letters has held out to his brother. Burke was more than a mere man of letters; but he could not be left out in any literary history, and we do

not know where to find another instance of such complete and powerful help to the ignorant and inexperienced. He went over the poems with the young author, pointing out to him certain apparent faults, which the young man amended with ready compliance. "When all was done that his abilities permitted, and when Mr. Burke had patiently waited the progress of improvement in the man whom he conceived to be capable of it, he himself took 'The Library' to Mr. Dodsley, then of Pall Mall, and gave many lines the advantage of his own reading and comments. Mr. Dodsley listened with all the respect due to the reader of the verses, and all the apparent desire to be pleased that could be wished by the writer; and he was as obliging in his reply as in the very nature of things a bookseller can be supposed to be towards a young candidate for poetical reputation." This is somewhat enigmatical; but its meaning seems to be that Dodsley, who had before rejected the MS. summarily, published it now at the poet's risk, and, with a generosity not common, "gave to the author his profits as a publisher and vendor of the pamphlet."

"The success of 'The Library' gave some reputation to the author, and was the occasion of his second poem, 'The Village,' which was corrected and a considerable portion of it written in the house of his excellent friend, whose own activity and energy of mind would not permit a young man under his protection to cease from labour, and whose judgment directed that labour to its most useful attainments." The exertions of this "excellent friend" were not con-

fined to one mode of affording assistance. "Mr. Crabbe was encouraged to lay open his views past and present; to display whatever reading and acquirements he possessed; to explain the causes of his disappointments and the cloudiness of his prospects, in short, to conceal nothing from a friend so able to guide inexperience and so willing to pardon inadvertency." "It was in the course of one of their walks" (adds the son who has quoted the above from an autobiographical sketch which his father left behind him) "that Burke, after some conversation on general literature, suggested by a passage in the Georgics which he had happened to quote, on observing something that was going on in his favourite farm, passed to a more minute inquiry into my father's early days in Suffolk than he had before made, and drew from him the avowal that with respect to future affairs he had a strong partiality for the church. 'It is most fortunate,' said Mr. Burke, 'that your father exerted himself to send you to that second school: without a little Latin we should have made nothing of you; now I think we shall succeed.'"

Here was true patronage; and it is impossible to have a better view of the advantages and disadvantages of that happy system. Upon the score of this "little Latin," and a few inquiries made into Crabbe's character in his native place as a matter of form, the statesman and orator, backed by other influences, got the Bishop of Norwich to ordain right away, apparently without study or preparation of any kind, the fortunate object of his kindness. In

this particular case, as no doubt in many others, no harm, but a great deal of good came of it, and probably neither Oxford nor Cambridge, nor all the theological faculties in existence, could have created a better country parson than the poor surgeon's apprentice out of Suffolk, the half-trained doctor whom an indulgent bishop accepted on Burke's word, backed by the favourable representations of Mr. Dudley North (the original lender of the five pounds) and Mr. Charles Long. But to make Sancho Panza a governor was scarcely a more arbitrary exercise of patronage. Every day such arrangements were becoming less possible, and Burke belonged to the advancing side, if not actually to anything that could be called the party of progress, when he thus gave, at the end of the system, the most triumphant evidence of its power. This power extended into every quarter from which advantage could come to the young poet. "When 'The Library' was published, the opinion of Burke had its effect upon the conductors of the various periodical works of the time. The poet received complimentary *critiques* from the very gentlemen who had hitherto treated him with such contemptuous coldness." And in still higher regions the same all-prevailing influence told. "His kind patron had spoken of him in favourable terms to the stern and formidable Thurlow, and his lordship was now anxious to atone for his former neglect. He received Mr. Crabbe (having invited him to breakfast) with more than courtesy, and most condescendingly said, 'The

first poem you sent me, sir, I ought to have noticed; and I heartily forgive the second.' They breakfasted together, and at parting his lordship put a sealed paper into my father's hand, saying, 'Accept this trifle, sir, in the meantime, and rely on my embracing an early opportunity to serve you more substantially when I hear that you are in orders.' As soon as he left the house he opened the letter, expecting to find a present of ten or perhaps twenty pounds; it contained a bank-note for a hundred!" Could any incident show more clearly the extraordinary change which a century has made? A young poet of our days would be as much confounded by the generosity of "Accept this trifle, sir," as if his noble entertainer had kicked him downstairs, however much the hundred pounds might be wanted. We seem to have fallen back fifty years at least, even from the day of Cowper and of Burns—notwithstanding that the system of publishing by subscription must always have a certain eleemosynary aspect. Thurlow's promise, however, does not seem to have borne very much fruit, and Crabbe had no objection to the bird in hand, which was worth more than any in the bush.

"The Library" was as slight a foundation as could be imagined for "complimentary *critiques*" and poetical fame. To conceive of it, indeed, as appearing an independent publication, among other books, and attracting any notice at all, makes the reader's head go round. It is shorter than any of the individual poems which formed Cowper's first volume, and is so completely of the old order of manufactured verses,

ground out by the "mere mechanic art," which was Pope's legacy to the world, that we can but look back astonished at the possibility of finding, in such a production, the foundation of a lasting fame. Here, as in the sudden transition of the author from the wretchedness of destitution to all the comfortable certainties which his friends provided for him, we feel ourselves in an earlier age, a different world. Other "singers" were twittering at the time in various corners, gentle Hayley, whom we love for his kindness to Cowper, learned Darwin among the fantastic sentimentalities of his garden, whom his greater grandson has restored to the recollection of the world, and many more. So far as this earliest production of Crabbe's "Muse" goes, there would seem to have been little reason to separate him from the mildly-tuneful crowd; but the same Review which characterised Cowper as "a man of a sober and religious turn of mind, with a benevolent heart, and a serious wish to inculcate the precepts of morality," but "not possessed of any superior abilities or power of genius," described Crabbe's little composition as "the production of no common pen"—so strangely uncertain are the guides of popular opinion.

The halcyon moment, however, which the young man spent under Burke's roof as a member of his family, meeting all the great people of the day, and presented with little billets such as the above, could not last for ever. And after his ordination he seems to have had an immediate experience of the other side of life, which was not encouraging. His first

occupation was as curate of Aldborough, and it can scarcely be supposed that his native place, where every rough fellow about the little pier had known him familiarly in a position very different from that which he now occupied, would afford a comfortable beginning in his new profession. He was "unkindly received," and saw so many "unfriendly countenances about me," that "I am sorry to say," he continues, "I had too much indignation, though mingled, I hope, with better feelings, to care what they thought of me or my sermon." This was not a very promising way of beginning a clergyman's life; and though we are all aware that a prophet has no honour in his own country, it is painful to hear of unfriendly faces on the one side, and to see on the other what a gloomy aspect the place, and everything in it, bore to Crabbe's eye. No glamour of kindly association is in the picture he gives of this native village. The very landscape becomes blighted and barren under his hands—

> "Rank weeds that every art and care defy,
> Reign o'er the land, and rob the blighted rye;
> There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,
> And to the ragged infant threaten war.
>
> * * * * *
>
> Here joyless roam a wild amphibious race,
> With sullen woe display'd in every face,
> Who far from civil arts and social fly,
> And scowl at strangers with suspicious eye.
>
> * * * * *
>
> As on the neighbouring beach yon swallows stand,
> And wait for favouring winds to leave the land;

While still for flight the ready wing is spread,
So waited I the favouring hour, and fled—
Fled from those shores where guilt and famine reign,
And cried, ah, hapless, those who still remain!"

It is very unusual to find a poet thus gloomily revengeful of early unkindness, giving up his native village to the horror of his readers. Burns had fewer comforts to look back upon than those possessed by Crabbe, yet "Coila" was to him the queen of countries, and his dearest hope was

"For puir auld Scotia's sake,
Some useful plan or buik to make,
Or sing a sang at least."

But these distinctions will always remain both in life and poetry, and some souls receive with enthusiasm of kindness what others take as cause for endless complaint and hostility. Perhaps, indeed, his almost invariable preference for the darker side, and sense of the matter-of-fact misery lying underneath every sentimental surface of country life, is more than anything else the cause of Crabbe's fame. From time immemorial every poet had celebrated the charms of that rural existence in which men were supposed to cultivate their own fields, to be made glad by the plentiful harvest, and consoled by the tranquillity around. But Crabbe saw "the knees tremble and the temples beat" of the reaper under "the dogstar's raging heat;" he saw the labourer return home, not forgetting all his cares like Burns's Cottar, but "imbibing the evening dew" through his "warm pores," and hoarding up "aches and anguish

for his age." And it was scarcely possible that there could be much sympathy between him and his towns-folk, whom he describes so bitterly, the "artful, surly, savage race," who had not cared for his ministrations to their bodies, and were little likely to be more disposed to receive his ministrations to their souls.

He remained here, accordingly, but a few months, and it seems evident, from all his after-experiences, that he never was popular as a clergyman. Perhaps a certain mixture of genial optimism and belief in the good qualities of the human race is necessary to the holder of a cure of souls. And Burke, always his friend, was as unwilling as Crabbe could be, to let his *protégé* languish in a poor curacy, in that uncongenial salt-water atmosphere. He procured for him the position of domestic chaplain to the Duke of Rutland, "a station such as has in numerous instances led to the first dignities of the church." This happy result, however, did not happen in Crabbe's case. He was not more than two years at Belvoir, during which time he was presented by Thurlow—with an assurance that, "by God, he was as like Parson Adams as twelve to a dozen"—with two small livings in Dorsetshire—livings which he does not seem so much as to have visited for several years. Afterwards, by the interest of the Duchess of Rutland, he was permitted to exchange them for two of superior value in the vale of Belvoir; and this, until a late period of his life, was all the preferment he obtained.

It was while he was in Belvoir, entirely separated from the life to which he has given such forcible and gloomy expression, that "The Village," the first of Crabbe's works which indicated his true power in poetry and his real place in his generation, was published. It had been written some time before, and it is said that the stern vigour of the lines in which he expressed his satisfaction in escaping from his native place was the special part of his poetry which moved Burke to so high an estimate of him. The poem was of a very different order from the artificial commonplace of "The Library." It not only chimed in with the sweeter contemporary voices so soon to be raised in the interests of nature, by directing "the Muse" out of all the conventional scenery sacred to her, to the homes and common life of the poor—but it outdid both Burns and Cowper in this particular by showing these homes in the naked prose of their most matter-of-fact aspect, neither lovely, nor happy, nor contented, but full of squalor, misery, and pain. This was the last touch in the picture, the discord that was needed for the perfection of the music. Fictitious pictures of peasant felicity have been common enough in all ages. When the luxurious have been sated with luxury, and the splendid with splendour, it has not been an unusual device to ape the simplicity of rustics, and make an elegant travesty of the life of the cottage to refresh the palace. In this way Marie Antoinette, when society was sickest, played at being a milkmaid in Trianon. And as in life, so in literature. Rousseau had set up the rural life as the only one

that approached perfection, and with all the force of conventionality, had declared the conventional to be the bane of mankind. It was a poetical commonplace that Corydon and Phillis were blessed above all the emperors and kings. This has always stood first among the voluntary delusions which have pleased the over-civilised. It was Crabbe's special gift to dig his axe down to the very root of this last refuge of artificial sentiment—

> "... The Muses sing of happy swains,
> Because the Muses never knew their pains,"

he says; and with all the fervour of indignant truth, and something of the sternness of a controversialist, places before us the bare and sober truth of that form of existence which all these pastoral pipes had celebrated in fictitious strains—

> "I grant indeed that fields and flocks have charms
> For him that grazes or for him that farms;
> But when amid such pleasing scenes I trace
> The poor laborious natives of the place,
> And see the midday sun, with fervid ray,
> On their bare heads and dewy temples play;
> While some, with feebler heads and fainter hearts,
> Deplore their fortune, yet sustain their parts—
> Then shall I dare these real ills to hide,
> In tinsel trappings of poetic pride?
> No; cast by Fortune on a frowning coast,
> Which neither groves nor happy valleys boast;
> Where other cares than those the Muse relates,
> And other shepherds dwell with other mates;
> By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,
> As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not:

Nor you, ye Poor, of letter'd scorn complain,
To you the smoothest song is smooth in vain;
O'ercome by labour, and bow'd down by time,
Feel you the barren flattery of a rhyme?
Can poets soothe you, when you pine for bread,
By winding myrtles round your ruin'd shed?"

This was Crabbe's mission in the new age. Cowper took England back to the spontaneity and ease of Nature, and showed her how much more beautiful and perfect was the real landscape even of her plains and undistinguished fields, and how much nearer the heart the incidents and accidents of daily life, than any inverted antithesis of savage mountains and smiling valleys, of Rapture and Despair. And Burns brought out the very sweetness of the natural heart, its tender musings, its love, its mirth, its compassion, the great thoughts, the sorrows, and joys that dwell in all human houses, as in his dwellings of the poor. These were the apostles of an equality such as needed no blood or tears to establish its beneficent law, which bound together the highest and the lowest, not by casting down one or raising up another, but by revealing each to each, where each was most real, and showing how love and grief, and all the inner consciousness of humanity, were among all true lovers, fathers, mothers, children, in all conditions the same. Crabbe's work was the completion of all this, though the more painful part. It was to dispel a false light which had separated the peasant, artificially, just as much as pride of place had separated the peer, from the general sympathy—to prove the Arcadian fields to

be regions of labour, hard and bitter, as any on earth, and the happy peasant to demand all the pity, all the succour, that the wretched need. Crabbe forged the last link in the chain—overthrew the last delusion. He led the student of Belinda's curls back to human life as Cowper did, and Burns; but he taught him a sterner lesson—a lesson equally essential to the clearing and opening up of the new world. "The Village" is entirely occupied with this task. The description of the dreary heath, and flat unfertile sands, the weeds that paint the country with vain splendour, "like the nymphs whom wretched arts adorn," the inhabitants, full of "sullen woe," strikes a key-note, which is carried out from page to page with bitterer force—

> "Where are the swains, who, daily labour done,
> With rural games play'd down the setting sun?"

they are occupied in the arts of the smuggler or the wrecker—

> "Or will you deem them amply paid in health,
> Labour's fair child that languishes with wealth?"

the poet asks, and draws us that picture of the labourer, to which we have already referred, strained to his utmost through the day, infected with all the miasmas of the damp air at night—the weak striving to keep up with the strong "till long-contending nature drops at last."

> "Or will ye praise that homely, healthy fare,
> Plenteous and plain, that happy peasants share?"

he cries: and shows them crushed by "the missing of

a stinted meal." Then comes a picture of the old man who once drew the straightest furrow, and was "chief in all the rustic trade," now driven from one petty occupation to another, and with no refuge but the workhouse, of which such a picture follows, as makes the reader shudder—

> "Theirs is yon House that holds the parish poor,
> Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door;
> There, where the putrid vapours, flagging, play,
> And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day;—
> There children dwell, who know no parent's care—
> Parents, who know no children's love, dwell there!
> Dejected widows with unheeded tears,
> And crippled age with more than childhood's fears;
> The lame, the blind, and, far the happiest they!
> The moping idiot, and the madman gay."

Nor does the poet leave the poor man, whom he traces remorselessly through all these miseries till he has deposited him, without even the burial ceremonies of religion—for

> "The busy priest, detain'd by weightier care,
> Defers his duty till the day of prayer"—

among "the mingled relics of the parish poor."

Thus Crabbe fulfils his part without flinching in the great work that had to be done. To disclose the poor man, that he is as good as yourself, with as many sweetenings of affection, as many sublime thoughts in his lowliness, was the mission of one poet; to disclose him sternly as so much worse than yourself, though your own flesh and blood, is the harsher errand of the other: but both of

them were wanted, and without the one the other would not have been complete. Not one more than another of these poets was conscious of his mission. No burden of prophecy weighed upon the heart of the gentle pluralist, the good parson who retained an inclination towards dukes and great folks all his life, and was never very popular among the class from which he sprang, and whose sufferings impressed him with all the more horror that he had but just escaped them in his own person—any more than there was in Burns a consciousness of the gaping wondering world looking on, while his plough disturbed the mouse and crushed the daisy, and asking, with a gasp of incredulous amazement, where he got those thoughts so much above his place? That the sublimest thoughts were not above that place, nor yet the most squalid misery below the enduring of these heirs of heaven, was what the two had to tell. It was of more worth to the world than the fiery doctrines which were being proclaimed in blood and flame across the Channel—of more worth because going below the outsides of things, and preaching no arbitrary equality and fraternity, but a brotherhood and a common standing ground which was fundamental. Burns "rhymed for fun," that is for the relief of his own spirit, to find a natural outlet for that which was in him—and Cowper for health, for distraction, to find in the company of the poet's unknown friends, those who had ears and could hear, deliverance from himself. Crabbe was less

spontaneous than either of them; he had the mark of the old *régime* upon him: he wrote his poems in the way of honest daily work, and with a distinct object: not knowing much more about the deeper scope of what he said than that the bias of his nature inclined him to such and such subjects. But all three, nevertheless, unconsciously worked together and helped each other out.

To show how differently these poems got into being from the others we have already treated, we may follow the course of "The Village" into the world. It was sent by the author to Burke, who transmitted it in his turn to Johnson. The autocrat received it very graciously. "It is original, vigorous, and elegant," he writes. "The alterations which I have made I do not require him to adopt, *for my lines are perhaps not often better than his own.*" Boswell too refers to the incident with great pride in the benignity of his idol. "The sentiments of Mr. Crabbe's admirable poem as to the false notions of rustic happiness and rustic virtue, were quite congenial with Dr. Johnson's own, and he took the trouble not only to suggest slight corrections and variations, but to furnish some lines *where he thought he could give the writer's meaning better than in the words of the manuscript.*" Crabbe does not seem to have found fault either with this exercise of autocratic criticism, or the benign humility of the admission, that "perhaps my lines are not often better than his own"—and adopted the six lines which Johnson supplied

apparently without a murmur; while Boswell adds, with smiling complacency yet candour, "I must, however, observe that the aids he gave to this poem, as to the 'Traveller' and the 'Deserted Village' of Goldsmith, were so small, as by no means to impair the distinguished merit of the author." But when the poem had gone through this wonderful ordeal more remained. It was again revised by Burke, who "proposed one or two trivial alterations, which my father's grateful feelings induced him to adopt, although they did not appear to himself improvements." "There were not wanting, I have heard," adds Crabbe's son and biographer, with natural indignation, "friends in Suffolk, who, when 'The Village' came out, whispered that the manuscript had been so cobbled by Burke and Johnson, that Crabbe did not know it again when it was returned to him." Perhaps these good-natured friends were not without some excuse for their mistake—being ignorant, as such critics are, that neither Burke nor Johnson could have written "The Village" with all their united genius, to save their lives.

Crabbe married shortly after, and his career had but few vicissitudes—a removal from one parsonage to another, the births and deaths that fill to overflowing the hearts of those most immediately concerned, yet count for so little in the outward history; a married life not quite so blissful as the faithful love before it had promised; and yet no tragic troubles of any kind, nothing

but the mingled thread in which there is generally so much more of the dark than bright, of common life. Notwithstanding the wonderful good fortune of his beginning, no special advantage came to him afterwards in his career, which, so far as his profession was concerned, was a very ordinary course of small promotions and indifferent content. He was benevolent and kind, but not generally popular—worshipped by his children, but greatly restrained in his social instincts by the delicate health of his wife, and not very happy at home. He was a great botanist, a mathematician, and an industrious student, making up the deficiencies of his preliminary education both in classics and the modern languages, reading a great deal, and thus occupying himself with many of those aids to existence, which help a man, not too busy or too happy, to get through the lingering years. "The Village" was published in 1783. In 1785 an insignificant and unmeaning production called "The Newspaper" appeared, dedicated to Thurlow; and it was not till the year 1806, twenty-two years after, that the "Parish Register," the author's next work, was completed. Between these two dates so much had happened that it was nothing less than a new world, into which the poet, with the same message on his lips, enlarged and rounded with superior art, yet perhaps in its diffuseness less impressive than the terse solemnity of "The Village," now reappeared. Such a gap breaks any life in two: but it did so still more at a period when the whole face of English

literature was being remodelled, and one of the greatest waves of poetical genius which the world has known had swept over the country. Crabbe lived long enough to take his part, after the share he had in the opening of this poetical era, amidst the full concert of younger voices, all sweeter, tenderer, more sympathetic than his own, yet wanting his harsh note to give them musical perfection.

In point of religious feeling Crabbe was at the opposite extreme of sentiment from Cowper. The private journals of his youth show him devout and pious—but in all the expressions of his maturer life, it is evident that the staid ideal of a composed and moderate religiousness, which seems to belong to a dignified establishment and settled irrevocable system, was his highest model of Christianity—and that all undue zeal or fervour appeared enthusiasm or fanaticism to his sober eyes. He was greatly annoyed when he went to Muston, one of the livings which he had held for years without ever visiting it, to find dissent flourishing within the fold.

> "True to his Church he came; no Sunday-shower
> Kept him at home in that important hour;
> Nor his firm feet could one persuading sect,
> By the strong glare of their new light direct,"

is the description he gives of the "noble peasant Isaac Ashford," one of the few ideal sketches in his repository. He has no sympathy with the painful strain of religious anxiety, or any vehement attempt to ameliorate the lives of others, or purify the

general stream of existence. He is not oppressed or disturbed in his own soul by the evils round him, but accepts and describes them methodically as the natural drawbacks of humanity. Of the parsons whom he brings in review before us in the "Parish Register," through the reminiscences of the old sexton Dibble, it is difficult to guess which he sympathises with most. They are all treated with the same matter-of-fact, semi-satirical, and quite impartial touch. The good sleepy soul who slumbers even in the pulpit, the wit who grinds the parish and takes tithe even from the sexton; the "golden times" of the wealthy and liberal parson, at whose "plenteous board" even "cool Dissenters fed," and who spread his gifts right and left; the author rector (presumably Crabbe himself), whose delight was all in books, who shunned men and women alike, "and hurried homewards when his tasks were done"—all these incumbents are kindly drawn: but the last of all the "Youth from Cambridge,"

> "Who did much his sober hearers vex,
> Confound the simple and the sad perplex,"

is the only portrait in which he touches his usual jarring and painful string. This latest holder of the cure of souls is the impersonation of that type of religion which inspired Cowper, which, in the early fervour of Wesley and his coadjutors, had regenerated the country, stirring up and quickening religious life even among those most opposed

to the new spirit, but which by this time had fallen into the fashion of the Evangelical party.

> "'Conviction comes like lightning, he would cry;
> In vain you seek it, and in vain you fly;
> 'Tis like the rushing of the mighty wind,
> Unseen its progress but its power you find;
> It strikes the child ere yet its reason wakes;
> His reason fled, the ancient sire it shakes;
> The proud, learn'd man, and him who loves to know
> How and from whence those gusts of grace will blow,
> It shuns,—but sinners in their way impedes,
> And sots and harlots visits in their deeds:
> Of faith and penance it supplies the place;
> Assures the vilest that they live by grace,
> And, without running, makes them win the race.'
> Such was the doctrine our young prophet taught."

The conclusion of this sketch, in which the fervid preacher on his death-bed is smitten by compunctions as to "the good I've wrought," and the defilement of "his moral rags," and alms-deeds, with the sexton's consolatory assurance—

> "Your faith's your prop, nor have you pass'd such time
> In life's good-works as swell them to a crime,"

shows the calm ecclesiastic's disapproval of all highly wrought spiritual influence, as well as Crabbe's strong dislike to the Evangelicals, of whose teaching he gives so cruel a version. In the accompanying tale of "Sir Eustace Grey," an effort in a new direction and not a happy one, the climax of the madman's story is his conversion, which by the narrator of the tale is evidently intended to appear as mad as any of the delusions that have gone before.

Crabbe was thus a world apart in religious feeling from the gentle recluse of Olney; as different as the self-commanded and thoroughly respectable parson was from the rustic rake and self-tormented penitent of Ayr and Dumfries. Good man! he had so much the better part of life, that he need not grudge the very different movement of the heart with which we turn to these two unfortunates, the favourites and the victims of life, whose miseries he escaped, though he shared in some degree their consecration.

GEORGE CRABBE, born 1754; died 1832.

Published The Library, 1781.
The Village, 1783.
Parish Register, 1807.
The Borough, 1810.
Tales in Verse, 1812.
Tales of the Hall, 1819.

CHAPTER V.

THE COTERIES BEFORE WORDSWORTH—THE SWAN OF LICHFIELD.

While these new and altered voices gained day by day a wider hearing, it must not be forgotten that a great many relics of the former epoch were still surviving about the country, and that careful couplets were still being elaborated, and all the scaffolding of criticism which had been put up for the perfection and polishing of every monument of the Augustan age, still obscured the smaller erections, the Temples of the Muses, which adorned here and there an ambitious poet's garden or nobleman's park. If the coteries were dying out in London, where the old lion's roar grew feebler, and Bozzy had been led away into matrimony and Scotland, and the genial house of the Thrales was broken up, and all the society that waited upon Johnson's nod was dispersed or dispersing, the spirit which had animated them was still surviving in various favoured spots in the country where the learned and the witty congregated together, and a little centre of intellectual amusement and ambition, giving occupation and happiness to a great many gentle lives, was set up. One of these, of which we

have the most admirable details, was established in Lichfield under the shadow of the palace. The gentle historian who has set it forth before our eyes is Anna Seward, herself a poet, according to all the established requirements of the day, the correspondent of many of the most distinguished persons of the time, a delightful feminine pedant, with all the graces of the ending century. Her letters, and her life of Dr. Darwin, admit us with all due ceremony, yet friendliness, into the charmed circles round the Close of Lichfield, to all the tea-parties and the rural expeditions, the literary discussions and love-makings of the time.

Erasmus Darwin was the physician of this favoured circle. He was a man of boundless personal energy, a big, clumsy, stammering, witty and genial personage, with an "extreme scepticism as to human truth," great powers of sarcasm—but, withal, that largeness and impetuosity of character which so often insures popularity, and especially pleases women, to whom its vigour, and sweep, and speed, are delightful by contrast. It was not, however, only to the refined and critical ladies of the Close, but to the whole country round, that this lumbering doctor commended himself. He was very skilful in his profession, very benevolent and charitable, and apparently full, in deeds, of that regard for others which his words did not disclose. There is something in the description of him which recalls the other great native of Lichfield, who was by no means a favourite in his own country. Darwin, like Johnson, was ungainly,

"his limbs too heavy for exact proportion: the traces of a severe small-pox: features and countenance which, when they were not animated by social pleasure, were rather saturnine than sprightly, a form inclined to corpulence, a stoop in the shoulders, and the then professional appendage, a full-bottomed wig," bring a figure before us very like that of the more memorable man, who satisfied his own extraordinary nature, so made up of nobleness and weakness, by the fine superstition of his penance in Lichfield market-place, where, as everybody knows, he stood bareheaded in the rain, amid the staring spectators, to expiate a boyish disobedience. Perhaps just then the pretty young ladies from the Bishop's palace tripped by in their airy muslins, and wondered much to see the strange spectacle; or the other busy doctor, elbowing the crowd, pushed the gazers out of his way as he went on to his patients, and stammered scorn at the unlikely sentiment. "Mutual and strong dislike," Miss Seward tells us, "existed between them." In all Dr. Johnson's letters, dated from Lichfield, the name of Darwin is never mentioned, "nor indeed," the historian adds with dignified surprise, "any of the ingenious and *lettered* people who lived there—while of its more common-life characters there is frequent mention, with many hints of Lichfield's intellectual barrenness—while it could boast a Darwin and other men of classical learning, poetic talents and liberal information!" One of these was the writer's father, a canon of the cathedral, who had edited the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, besides writing verses, of which little

record has been kept; but this was quite enough to make him a member of the literary class, and deeply sensitive to the fact of being passed over. "By people of literary taste and judgment," Miss Seward says, her father's work "is allowed to be the best commentary on those dramatic works which has appeared;" and "Shakspeare had few more spirited eulogists than Mr. Seward." Another of the Lichfield literati overlooked by the arrogant Johnson was Archdeacon Vyse, who was "not only a man of learning, but of Prioric talents in the metrical impromptu." "Gentle reader, behold an instance!" cries Miss Seward, and thereupon quotes a poem of nine long stanzas made upon a certain "fair Charlotte Lynes" at a convivial meeting of Lichfield gentlemen, *most of whom could make agreeable verses.* But though the flowers of poetry flourished there, thorns grew among them. These verses were much read, admired, and copied. Mr. Vyse thought his fair Charlotte growing too vain in consequence, and once, when she was complimented on the subject, in a large company, he said smilingly—

"Charlotte the power of song can tell,
For 'twas the ballad made the belle,"

which was not very chivalrous, nor even gentlemanly. "*These*," adds Miss Seward, "were the men whose intellectual existence passed unnoticed by Dr. Johnson in his depreciating estimate of Lichfield talents. But Johnson liked only *worshippers*."

Anna herself was the flower and climax of all these

wits. She was a beautiful girl, with a classical education, and the greatest "taste," according to the tenets which still held fast hold of literary coteries, at once an accomplished writer of verses and the keenest of critics. Whenever she quotes, as she is fond of doing, a set of verses, her instinct of analysis is at once at work. As an example of the literary atmosphere before the winds blew away all these gentle mists of verbal play, we may quote Miss Seward's comment upon one of her hero's productions—an elegy of which we give only the verses discussed—

"Dread dream that, hovering in the midnight air,
Clasped with thy dusky wing my aching head,
While to imagination's startled ear
Toll'd the slow bell for bright Eliza, dead.

"Stretched on her sable bier the grave beside,
A snow-white shroud her breathless bosom bound,
On her wan brow the mimic lace was tied;
And Love and Virtue hung their garlands round."

"The second verse" (says Miss Seward) "of this charming elegy affords an instance of Dr. Darwin's too exclusive devotion to distinct picture in poetry: that it sometimes betrayed him into bringing objects so precisely to the eye, as to lose in such precision their power of striking forcibly upon the heart. The pathos in the second verse is injured by the words 'mimic lace,' which allude to the perforated borders of the shroud. The expression is too minute for the solemnity of the subject. Certainly it cannot be proper for a shocked or agitated mind to observe or to describe with such petty accuracy. Besides, the allusion is not sufficiently obvious. The reader pauses to consider what the poet means by 'mimic lace.' Such pauses deaden sensation and break the course of attention. A friend of the doctor's pleaded strongly that the line might run thus—

"On her wan brow the *shadowy crape* was tied,"

but the alteration was rejected. Inattention to the rules of grammar in the first verse was also pointed out to him at the same time. The dream is addressed—

> " 'Dread dream that clasped my aching head,'

but nothing is said to it, and therefore the sense is left unfinished, while the elegy proceeds to give a picture of the lifeless beauty. The same friend suggested a change which would have remedied the defect thus—

> " 'Dread was the dream that in the midnight air
> Clasped with its dusky wing my aching head,
> While to,' etc.

"Hence not only the grammatic error would have been done away, but the grating sound produced by the near alliteration of the harsh *dr* in 'dread dream' removed, by placing those words at a greater distance from each other. This alteration was for the same reason rejected. The doctor would not spare the word *hovering*, which he said strengthened the picture; but surely the image ought not to be elaborately precise, by which a dream is transformed into an animal with black wings."

This will afford an example of the process going on over those verses, which now win here and there the attention of the student, but are carefully avoided by the general reader, who no longer is in the mood to be interested in "bright Eliza's" problematical shroud. Thus they talked while the tea-kettle simmered, and "Miss Pussy Po" purred at her mistress's feet. The beautiful old rooms in the palace were the home of taste and poetry and friendship; most of the gentle company there "could make agreeable verses." Young Mr. Edgeworth, "a young and gay philosopher," and his eccentric friend Mr. Day, were drawn to Lichfield by the reputation of Dr. Darwin. Here also came "the Rev. Mr. Michell. He

was skilled in astronomic science, modest and wise;" "The ingenious Mr. Kerr of West Bromwich; Mr. Boulton, known and respected wherever mechanic philosophy is understood; Mr. Watt, the celebrated improver of the steam-engine; and above all others . . . the accomplished Dr. Small of Birmingham."

Such was the doctor's private circle which Johnson scorned. Mr. Edgeworth and Mr. Day were the only ones specially honoured with notice from the palace. Of the former, we are told that "his address was gracefully spirited and his conversation eloquent; he danced, he fenced, and winged his arrows with more than philosophic skill." Besides these qualities he is known to fame as the father of "the great Maria," and to Lichfield as the husband of several wives, drawn from among her fairest: but Mr. Day was still more interesting. "He published in later years two noble poems, 'The Dying Negro' and 'The Devoted Legions': also 'Sandford and Merton,' which by wise parents is put into every youthful hand." A number of charming young women made up the company — all lovely, to judge from the enthusiastic descriptions of the historian, and herself and her pretty sister among the loveliest there. Sir Walter Scott, who saw Miss Seward only in old age, gives his testimony that she must have been "exquisitely beautiful." The Vale of Stowe lay at their feet, visible from the palace windows; and coming home from their walks and rides, the young people worshipped, whenever they came in sight of them, the three beautiful towers, called by one enthusiastic girl

"the Ladies of the Valley," under shelter of which Anna the Muse and pretty Sarah, who died at eighteen, and Honora the adopted child, had grown into beauty and fascination. Young Major André, one of the most lamented victims of the American War, was a member of one of those cheerful groups, and many a poetic youth paid his homage. None of them, however, had so romantic a story as Day, whose adventures Miss Seward tells at length, and all his philosophical failures in life. Her description of him is worthy of quotation, if only to show the kind of pen-and-ink painting which was popular in these days.

"Powder and fine clothes were at that time the appendages of gentlemen. Mr. Day wore neither. He was tall, and stooped in his shoulders; full made, but not corpulent; and in his meditative and melancholy air a degree of awkwardness and dignity were blended. We found his features interesting and agreeable, through the traces of a severe small-pox. There was a sort of weight upon the lids of his large hazel eyes; yet when he declaimed

"'Of good and evil
Passion and apathy, and glory and shame,'

very expressive were the energies gleaming from them beneath the shade of sable hair, which, Adam-like, curled about his brows. . . . In the course of the year 1770 Mr. Day stood for a full-length picture to Mr. Wright of Derby. A strong likeness and a dignified portrait were the result. He stands, leaning his arm on a column inscribed to Hampden. Mr. Day looks upwards, as enthusiastically meditating on the contents of a book held in his dropped right hand. The open leaf is the oration of that virtuous patriot in the Senate against the grant of ship-money demanded by King Charles the First. A flash of lightning plays in Mr. Day's hair, and illuminates the contents

of the volume. . . . Dr. Darwin sat to Mr. Wright about the same period. *That* was a simply contemplative portrait of the most perfect resemblance."

Dr. Darwin was not so attractive as this unlucky philosopher, whose freak of training a perfect wife for himself is so well known, and was so unsuccessful. Miss Seward gives the whole story of it, and describes "the beauteous Sabrina," a foundling girl whom he brought to Lichfield, in order to train her into an epitome of all the virtues, as an object of great interest to the ladies in the palace. When his experiment failed, he discovered that Honora Sneyd, the beautiful girl who was the adopted child of Canon Seward, and the darling of his house, was everything his fancy had painted. But Honora, whom André had adored, would have nothing to say to the philosopher, nor would her sister, to whom he afterwards transferred his affections. Even before the episode of the beauteous Sabrina, this original had been jilted, and had written "a beautiful elegy," in half-a-hundred verses, upon his evil fate. Thus, finding in every event an occasion for more stanzas, or for a flood of carefully polished couplets, to be subjected to all the criticisms of the coterie, these poetical people went through life consoling themselves with literature amid all its harsher realities. No doubt the Muse helped Mr. Day through the many vicissitudes of his sentimental career. Nor were these the only poets of the society. Mr. John Gisborne, who wrote "The Vales of Weaver;" Mr. Munday, whose poem upon "Needwood Forest," printed for private circulation

only, "one of the most beautiful *local* poems that has been written," as the enthusiastic historian informs us, she presented to Sir Walter Scott at the very end of her life as a distinguished token of friendship; Sir Brooke Boothby, whose claims do not seem to be founded upon any special production, and many more, fluttered round the two central figures, those of clumsy Dr. Darwin and the beautiful Muse of the Close. She has a great enthusiasm for all those now unknown sons of genius. The effusions of Mr. John Gisborne are such, she thinks, that it "would disgrace the national taste if they should be suffered to pass away without their fame;" and in order to ensure them some share of it, she quotes at great length from this "efflorescence of a rich imagination" such verses as the following:—

> "As the sonorous North assails
> Weaver's bleak hills and leafless vales,
> With awful majesty of might,
> He bursts the billowy clouds of night;
> Booms the resounding glens among,
> And, roaring, rolls his snows along."

Miss Seward puts a footnote to the word "booms." "A word," she cries, "admirably expressing the noise of winds, and applied to it here for the first time in poetry." What a delightful fund of occupation for a gentle unemployed life must have been given by those prolonged commentaries! Better even than those labours of the needle—

> "The well-depicted flower
> Wrought patiently into the snowy lawn,"

for which "the Swan of Lichfield" (which was this charming young woman's poetical title) was equally distinguished.

Miss Seward's own poetical efforts were begun very early; she played with the muse from her childhood. "At first," she says in one of her letters, "my father encouraged it." He was himself a poet, as well as the editor and critic of the old dramatists. "But my mother threw cold water on the rising fires," she adds; "and even my father ceased to smile encouragement upon these attempts after my sixteenth birthday, in which Dr. Darwin unluckily told him that his daughter's verses were better than his—a piece of arch injustice to my father's muse which disgusted him with mine." These little minstrels, it is evident, were very touchy and jealous of their respective degrees of excellence. After this early suppression, however—but how long after we are not informed—the famous rites at Batheaston, where another poetical coterie existed under the auspices of a certain Lady Miller, developed and introduced to "the world," such as that world was, the elegant strains of the jealous canon's daughter. The Batheaston celebration was held periodically (once a week, we think, while the season lasted), and all the elegant visitors of the Bath who had the honour of Lady Miller's acquaintance drove over to this highly superior kind of garden party. Miss Austen, we presume, was not old enough to have taken part in it, or certainly Catherine Morland, with her wide-open eyes, would have had an invitation, and gazed at all the poets

and poetesses. When the fine company had assembled, the competing poems, which had been put into an "Etruscan vase," were drawn forth in succession by the judges, and read aloud, to the delight of all those persons of taste. Among Miss Seward's collected works there are a great many elegies and monodies headed "Prize poem at Batheaston;" and Miss Burney gives a lively account of the ceremonial in her diary. These celebrations emancipated Anna from the cold shade of domestic repression, and by this time, no doubt, the Swan of Lichfield had grown old enough to have her own way. There is a very pathetic story of the death of her sister Sarah at nineteen, on the eve of her marriage, which no doubt made the will and wishes of Anna of double importance in the bereaved house. Pretty glimpses of a generous and impulsive young woman appear even through the antiquated graces of her narrative. Lady Northesk, an interesting stranger dying of consumption, stopped at Lichfield on her way to the north to consult the doctor, whose fame was great in all the country round; and it occurred to Dr. Darwin that hers was a case in which that romantic remedy transfusion of blood, so seldom heard of except in novels, might be efficacious. Miss Seward immediately offered her own lily-white arm as the fountain of new life to the new friend whom she had taken up with romantic fervour. "My health is perfect, neither am I conscious of any lurking disease, hereditary or accidental. I have no dread of the lancet, and will gladly spare from time to time such a portion from my veins to Lady Northesk as Dr. Darwin shall

think proper." When things had come so far as this, however, the poetical doctor drew back, alarmed by the risk, alleging the difficulty of "the construction of a proper machine" for the injection. But Lady Northesk never forgot the generous offer; and it gives us a pleasant picture of the enthusiastic girl, to whom Friendship, celebrated in a thousand verses, was the most sacred of ties.

Here, however, we see the two poets, the doctor and the maiden, in a still more poetical combination.

"About the year 1777, Dr. Darwin purchased a little wild umbrageous valley, a mile from Lichfield, amongst the only rocks which border that city so nearly. It was irriguous from various springs, and swampy from their plenitude. One of its native features had long excited the attention of the curious—a rock, which in the central depths of the glen drops perpetually about three times in a minute. Aquatic plants border its top and branch from its fissures; no length of summer drouth abates, no rains increase, its humidity; no frost congeals its droppings. The doctor cultivated this spot, 'and paradise was opened in the wild.' Not only with trees of various growth did he adorn the borders of the fountain, the brook, and the lakes, but with various classes of plants, uniting the Linnean science with the charm of landscape. For the Naiad of the fountain he wrote the following inscription:—

SPEECH OF A WATER NYMPH.

'If the meek flower, of bashful dye,
Attract not thy incurious eye—
If the soft murmuring rill to rest
Enchain not thy tumultuous breast—
Go where ambition lures the vain,
Or avarice barters peace for gain!'

"Dr. Darwin restrained his friend Miss Seward's steps to this

her always favourite scene, till it had assumed its new beauties from cultivation. He purposed accompanying her on her first visit to his botanic garden, but a medical summons from the country deprived her of that pleasure. She took her tablets and pencil, and, seated on a flower-bank in the midst of that luxuriant retreat, wrote the following lines while the sun was gilding the glen, and while birds of every plume poured their song from the boughs."

The reader would like to see the verses thus poetically composed; but he is not very likely, save with some research and trouble, to find them in the three long volumes of poetry which Miss Seward left behind her, or even in their illegitimate place where they stand at the head of the "Botanic Garden," which is Dr. Darwin's chief title to poetic fame—so we may be excused if we quote from them here. After an address to "ye proud," whom the gentle poet adjures to "come not here," the true favourite of the muses is thus invited:—

"But thou, whose mind the well-attempered ray
Of Taste and Virtue lights with purer day,
Whose finer sense each soft vibration owns
Mute and unfeeling to discorded tones;
Like the fair flower that spreads its lucid form
To meet the sun, but shuts it to the storm:
For thee my borders nurse the glowing wreath,
My fountains murmur, and my zephyrs breathe,
My painted birds their vivid plumes unfold,
And insect armies wave their wings of gold.

"And if with thee some hapless maid should stray,
Disastrous love companion of her way,
O! lead her timid step to yonder glade,
Whose weeping rock recumbent alders shade,

There as meek Evening wakes the temperate breeze,
And moonbeams glimmer through the trembling trees,
The rills that gurgle round shall soothe her ear,
The weeping rock shall number tear for tear;
And as sad Philomel, alike forlorn,
Sings to the night reclining on her thorn,
While at sweet intervals each falling note
Sighs in the gale and whispers round the grot,
The sister-woe shall calm her aching breast,
And softest slumbers steal her cares to rest.

"Thus spoke the Genius as he stept along,
And bade these lawns to Peace and Truth belong."

"By the genius of the place is meant its first cultivator, Dr. Darwin," Miss Seward adds in a footnote. When she gave her poem to the doctor, he "seemed pleased with it," and suggested the "Linnæan System" as "a happy subject for the Muse." "I will write the notes, which must be scientific," he said, "and you shall write the verse." Miss Seward, however, demurred. She did not think that the plan was "strictly proper for a female pen," probably because of those loves of the plants which bore so large a share in it; but "she felt how eminently it was adapted to the efflorescence of his own fancy."

This was how the "Botanic Garden," that "magnificent poem," a work which, according to Miss Seward, "forms a new class in poetry, and by so doing gives to the British Parnassus a wider extent than it possessed in Greece or in ancient or modern Rome;" a poem that, "if poetic taste is not much degenerated, will live as long as the Metamorphosis;" which

"must endure so long as the English language shall exist; nay, should that perish, translation would preserve the 'Botanic Garden' as one of its gems"—came into being. Few readers of the present day will have so much as seen this lengthy and elaborate production. It was published (or at least part of it) in 1781, just about the time when Crabbe was making his first essay. The second part, however, was not given to the world till after the three great new poets whom we have already treated had fully occupied the ear of the world. And yet with that contrast in existence, and the new life coming in so strongly, the "Botanic Garden" was a successful and popular work. Darwin was paid £900 for it, which is one test of its excellence. The doctor, however, though so fine a poet, was not a very scrupulous man. He took those elegant lines which Miss Seward, seated on a bank of flowers, and taking out her tablets and pencil, had written for him, and made them, without any acknowledgment, the introduction to his poem. They are quoted as a specimen of his poetical style in Chambers's excellent *Cyclopædia of Literature.* The gentle Muse of Lichfield is very moderate and very dignified in all she says on the subject—nevertheless there is a touch of indignation in the tone with which she reclaims her property.

Such an appropriation is not much in keeping with the big and rude and burly image, in itself very unlike that of a poet, which is developed with no small power in Miss Seward's memoir. It is a

pity she had not left poetry alone, and given us more of those graphic if high-flown descriptions—but the sentimental flood of her letters is too washy to be waded through in search of other gems of this kind. She was complimented in her turn by Darwin, who owed her so many compliments, as the inventress of epic elegy—and by Hayley, the biographer of Cowper, himself a songster of the same order, and cultivating poetry and taste among his neighbours in a similar way. He describes "the Muse of Elegy" in a poetical tribute addressed to her.

> "Speaking to earth the kind enthusiast came,
> And veil'd her heavenly power with SEWARD'S name."

while all that listen to her strains

> "Bless the enchanting lyre by glory strung,
> Envying the dead who are so sweetly sung."

Miss Seward, however, does not claim any unrivalled power for herself even in this special vein. "Many excel me in writing verse," she says with dignified modesty, "perhaps scarcely one in the vivid and strong sensibility of its excellence, or in the ability to estimate its claims." It is her strong sense of this "ability to estimate" the claims of genius which makes her criticisms so bold and gives her praise such a triumphant certainty. An amusing proof of her confidence in her own powers is given in one of her letters, in which she takes it upon herself to improve the prose style of (of all people in the world) Addison,

informing a correspondent that "you will find the words in italics which strike me as forming the inelegance of Addison's style, and you will perceive that words within hooks constitute its redundance." Her discrimination is more perceptible when she upholds the cause of a new poet against the old. "When," she says, "with avowed delight in the poetic powers of Cowper's 'Task,' the writer of these strictures, in conversation with Dr. Darwin and Sir Brooke Boothby, asked their opinion of that poem, each declared they could not read it through; each taxed it with egotism, with prosaicism, with a rough and slovenly style, and with utter want of regular design."

Such were the ways of judging and the methods of criticism current among the old school. Miss Seward thinks that it was "the jealous spirit of authorism" which "darkened the candour" of her doctor. But as she tells us shortly after that he "had ever maintained a preference of Akenside's blank verse to Milton's; declared that it was of higher polish, of more chaste purity, and more dignified construction," we may be permitted to doubt his critical judgment, without even her charitable supposition that his "taste" was somewhat enervated by too much refinement. Refinement, indeed, except in verse, does not seem to have been Dr. Darwin's quality, and the velvet pile of his poetry sits oddly enough upon the homespun of his character, to use a congenial simile. The curious link of connection between

the opinions which this scientific manufacturer of rhymes had begun to hold and express in the end of last century, and those which have made his descendant remarkable in this, is very interesting to the imagination; and we wish Erasmus Darwin had been a little more heroic. One or two incidents, however, of an interesting kind, are related of the energetic doctor. The elegy to "bright Eliza," which we find criticised so closely, was conceived if not written while Dr. Darwin was in attendance upon the lady, who afterwards became his wife. She was at the moment the wife of another man, but that had not hindered some passionate expressions of poetical devotion. The lady had been seized with violent fever, and the doctor was sent for. "Not being requested to continue in the house through the ensuing night, which he apprehended might prove critical, he passed the remaining hours till day-dawn beneath a tree opposite her apartment, watching the passing and repassing lights in the chamber. During the period in which a life he so passionately valued was in danger, he paraphrased Petrarch's celebrated sonnet, narrating a dream whose prophecy was accomplished by the death of Laura." The idea of this he afterwards extended into the elegy. However, that *nuit blanche* under the tree, of the stout, stammering, hard-headed, unbelieving doctor, a middle-aged widower, under the windows of another man's wife, has a sort of grotesque romance, all unlike his artificial and elaborate strains, which touches the heart a little, though it is difficult at the same time to refrain

from a smile. We feel that Miss Seward, knowing the circumstances, should not have been so hard on the *dr*ead *dr*eam ; but then perhaps she did not think the lady worth all that trouble ; and certainly it was very improper on the part of the doctor.

To balance the romance we have a semi-heroic narrative of a certain occasion, on which Dr. Darwin, who, as a rule, eschewed all intoxicating liquors, was persuaded to drink more wine than was good for him. It was while on a boating expedition, and in the middle of a hot midsummer day. To the horror and astonishment of his friends, the half-intoxicated doctor suddenly plunged out of the boat into the river, when they were close to Nottingham, and rushing in his wet clothes across the fields, reached the market-place before they could overtake him. Here they found him mounted on a tub, making an oration to the gaping multitude around. "Ye men of Nottingham, listen to me," he said. "You are ingenious and industrious mechanics. By your industry, life's comforts are procured for yourselves and families. If you lose your health, the power of being industrious will forsake you, *that* you know: but you may not know that to breathe fresh and changed air constantly is not less necessary to procure health than sobriety itself. Air becomes unwholesome in a few hours if the windows are shut. . . . I have no *interest* in giving you this advice. Remember what I, your countryman and a physician, tell you. If you would not bring infection and disease upon yourselves, and to your

wives and little ones, change the air you breathe; change it many times a day by opening your windows."

After which abrupt address he got down from his tub, and went back with his friends to their boat. The dripping philosopher on his homely platform, the gaping crowd about him, an eager apothecary of his acquaintance vainly endeavouring to persuade him to come home with him and change his wet clothes, and the astounded excursionists standing by not knowing what to make of their friend's vagary, form an amusing picture. He was before his age so far as regards sanitary conditions, it is evident: poetry is a different matter.

But the Lichfield coterie altogether gives us a quaint and amusing picture of the little literary societies spread over the face of the country, where Taste was set up as the tutelary spirit, and Criticism of the minutest carefulness, serious as if the fate of empires hung upon her decisions, pondered every line, and "most of the gentlemen," not to say the ladies also, "could make agreeable verses." Lady Miller at Batheaston was, as has been said, the presiding genius of another of these refined circles. And there was Hayley in Sussex in that landscape which Cowper found too mountainous and exciting, with Mrs. Charlotte Smith in her cottage near, who would come and read them her romances till the little circle thrilled with interest, and counted the hours from evening to evening, that they might trace a little further the history of Celestina or Louisa. They were

all devoted to Nature, these clever people, and never tired of describing her. She was to them a benevolent and lovely old princess, clothed in embroideries and ornamented with countless jewels. They patronised her, and went to her for consolation as they would have gone to any other old queen of society who was benignant as well as splendid. Their intercourse with her was a sort of continuous *fête champêtre*, at which she was hostess, giving them tea and smiles, patting them on the shoulders when they were melancholy. She had little to say to the common herd, but for her favourites was there ever so aimable, so tender a dowager? They could not sufficiently exclaim to themselves and each other how delightful she was, how sweet and kind. Miss Seward was, so to speak, a maid of honour, or Lady High Chamberlain to this beautiful old queen: and Dr. Darwin, if not a court physician, was at least so scientifically devoted to her court robes and the handsome appearance and value of her surroundings, that he too was entitled to her most bewitching smile.

But all this is very different from the atmosphere which now fills our heavens and earth. It is the prettiest possible side of the old *régime* which was ending. Except that now and then some one died or was crossed in love, there seems little sign of earthly ills or passions in that flowery city, surrounded by such soft distances, and crowned by the "Ladies of the Valley," the three towers where old art and heavenly music and religion had their mysterious throne. Art, it is true, as represented by a Gothic cathedral was held

in but little store, and religion, save in sentiment, was kept carefully in her right place; but yet the towers were dear from association, and enhanced the attractions of that sweet old goddess who dwelt outside the town, growing innumerable banks of flowers, and ready at any moment to have all her minstrels and all their admirers out to tea.

ANNA SEWARD, born 1747; died 1809.

ERASMUS DARWIN, born 1731; died 1802.

Published Botanic Garden in 1781.

Loves of the Plants in 1789.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW BROTHERHOOD.

When the face of English literature had been thus changed, the old follies put to flight and the new life brought in, with a tremulous ecstasy and universal quiver of emotion and movement, the time came for that new flood of genius which is the distinction of our own day. It is true that at least two generations have come and gone over the earth since Wordsworth and his brother poets were first revealed. But they all lived well into our own century, and they belong to a condition of things entirely altered from those which influenced the former epoch. Our living poets are their legitimate and unquestioned descendants, and the Age which they have made illustrious is as yet scarcely completed; so that we are justified in calling this last great era of poetical history our own time. Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge in one group; Byron, Shelley, and Keats in another; Scott—an army in himself; and various smaller but still remarkable figures, came all together, as splendid a band as has ever breathed the same air—rivals, coadjutors, fellow-workmen, perfecting a new system and establishing a new reign. Into these mingled

voices Crabbe lived long to add his harsh yet effective tone. But the other Precursors had disappeared in the wilderness through which they had hewed out for their successors so wonderful a path. Burns remained a power and inspiration among the new race, affecting even the sober and dignified mind of Wordsworth as one of the most living of influences ; but Cowper, who is so much less forcible and commanding a figure, and in whom there was no energy of passion to keep hold of the imagination of his heirs and successors, would seem to have passed away from their recollection altogether. So far as the new school of poets was concerned, his mission was little acknowledged, notwithstanding that his poetical inheritance fell, like so much else that was rich and rare, into the hands of the immortal Dalesman, the poet of those wide atmospheres and silent skies, which in so different a form had breathed life into the invalid upon the banks of the fat and languid Ouse.

It is difficult to understand by what quaint and arbitrary link of association the three friends, who were to forge between them the next links in the poetical chain, got to be called the Lake poets—or rather got to be joined in so close a fellowship that their names cling together inevitably like a line in a beadroll. There was so little real affinity between the serious, almost solemn, manhood and musing genius of Wordsworth, the mystical and wayward spirit of Coleridge, and the virtuous precision and hard-working faculty of Southey, that they might have founded three different schools, instead of, by

obstinate fiction, being held to represent but one. However, it is too late now to attempt to disturb the classification which lasted all their lives, notwithstanding that even their appreciation of each other, so enthusiastic and generous in youth, waned with the progress of the years.

The first appearance of this new group to mortal view is in the brisk and somewhat impertinent pages of Mr. Joseph Cottle, a bookseller in Bristol, himself one of the old race of local versemakers, and in his way a homely Mæcenas, always ready with a good deal of enthusiasm and a small sum of money, both of which things were greatly in request among the penniless but ardent youths. Bristol, too, was one of the centres of lively and artificial literary life, so many of which were at that time in existence. The presiding genius, however, was of a sterner kind than the Swan of Lichfield. Hannah More, surrounded by her admiring sisters, was the ornament and pride of the neighbouring country, and though it would not seem that Southey, a native of Bristol, had attracted her notice, yet Mr. Cottle had permission to conduct any friend of his to an audience of the great woman of letters, whom all the fine personages in the country came to worship, and who had recently evolved a poet out of her milkwoman—though this is scarcely respectful to Anne Yearsley, who, though a prodigy and subject to the fate of such, had considerable power of versification and much poetical feeling, and was worthy of a better fate. Mr. Cottle himself was a poet, and

so was his brother Amos,[1] who died young, and whose portrait the good man published along with those of the great Three whom he was instrumental in introducing to the world. His complacent and confused gossip is not to be compared with the more dignified narratives of the lives of the poets, but it is not without some power of portraiture, and it brings the young men before us in a group, a sort of rude fresco-painting, such as is sometimes more effective than a finer work of art. Southey and Coleridge were introduced to him by Robert Lovell, their friend and associate, "a young Quaker," who was also a kind of a poet (indeed in Bristol, as in Lichfield, most of the gentlemen seem to have made agreeable verses), and who communicated to the mind of Cottle something of his own admiration for his gifted friends, one of whom came from Cambridge, and the other from Oxford, in itself an argument for respect. They had both, however, broken off their college career abruptly, leaving their Universities without degrees, and the lives of each had already been tinged with adventure. Southey, the most perfectly well conducted of young men, had been expelled from Westminster school for over bold speech in a schoolboy newspaper. Coleridge, for some purely fantastic motive, had enlisted in a cavalry regiment, and spent some months under that curious discipline, not without enjoyment. Now, the two had got a

[1] "Oh Amos Cottle! Phœbus, what a name
To fill the speaking trump of future fame!"
BYRON'S *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.*

fancy in their heads, struck out somehow between the dreamy but inexhaustible invention of the one and the romantico-practical imagination of the other, of emigrating to America with a few chosen friends, and setting up a new Utopia—a dream-colony of Apostolic freedom and equality, where every worldly possession should be in common, and Idyllic peace and plenty and love should reign. Lovell, the young Quaker, was one of the brethren vowed to this enterprise, looking forward to it with eager excitement; and, mad as the scheme appears to us, it would seem to have had some air of possibility at the moment, since Southey's mother and her family intended to join the expedition, and for some time the minds of an anxious circle of people were occupied with it. They met in Bristol apparently with some remote intention of sailing from that place, if Providence would but send them a little money with which to buy agricultural implements and pay their passage-money. And there were other inducements. Lovell was already married to a Miss Fricker of Bristol, to one of whose sisters Southey was engaged; and Coleridge lost no time in falling in love with a third. The Pantisocracy, which was to be the name of their society, exacted marriage, and this was about the only practical step the brethren took to carry its requirements out.

Such was the group which suddenly gathered in the path of the excellent Mr. Cottle, surprising him into such mingled emotions of complacency and reverence as fill his gossiping book with their reflec-

tion still. He had the discrimination to perceive that these were poets far exceeding any faculty of his, but he felt at the same time the benign superiority of money, giving him an advantage over them, which he was generously willing to use for their good. They were penniless, though their plans were so magnificent, and their little stock-in-trade was an unsaleable article, which the ordinary merchants in literary commodities would not buy. Indeed, it was only one of them who had any stock-in-trade at all; Coleridge's few poems were not half important enough for publication, and Mr. Cottle was somewhat of a wizard to detect the genius of which there was as yet so little proof. But what an importation of life and hope this little band brought into the old Bristol streets! Young Southey holding his handsome head high; young Coleridge with all the mystic future in his big dreamy eyes, and his mouth full of endless projects, one rising out of another like flowers from a stem; the first a refined and chivalrous gentleman at all times; the other an enchanter whose eloquence no man could withstand. To hear them talk of the new world that lay before them, the visionary society they were to form, the "undivided vale" by the side of the Susquehannah—soft-syllabled stream, which no doubt must flow like its name, and was chosen for that exquisite reason—in which their home was to rise, the conditions of the paradisiacal life they were to lead there—could any poem be more delightful? By the gravest calculations, they had made out that two hours a

day would suffice to get their daily bread out of that fertile poetical soil, and the rest of the time would be for poetry, for love, for endless talk, for books and the contemplation of nature: what matter that in the meantime, but for Mr. Cottle, it would have been difficult to pay their lodgings? All such sordid troubles would be over if once they could but reach that Land of Promise. Southey had Joan of Arc almost ready, which, "should the publication be anyways successful," would be enough, he thought, "to carry me over, and get me some few acres, a spade, and a plough." Coleridge had not even so much as that to trust to, but expected the spade, the plough, and the passage-money to drop down upon him from the genial skies.

In this strait Cottle came to the rescue nobly. He offered Coleridge thirty guineas for a volume of poetry yet to be written, and the same to Southey; while he undertook, at the same time, to give fifty pounds for "Joan of Arc"—altogether a romantic liberality which no sane publisher, who had not been at the same time a poet-worshipper and possessed of the gift of divination, could have ventured on. And the young men helped themselves on by delivering lectures, of which some, we cannot help suspecting, never came further than the prospectus; for it is difficult to imagine how Coleridge, at such a moment, could lecture upon the French Revolution, at that period in full and feverish career, contrasting it with the great Rebellion, without raising more excitement than was tolerable among the people of Bristol. For

the subject was not one which either side took calmly, and the two young poets, it need scarcely be said, were wildly enthusiastic on the side of freedom and the French, and lost no opportunity, poetical or otherwise, of denouncing all action on the part of England against them, and cursing, in good round oaths, all the demon-powers who were uniting together to crush France and the new-born liberty which from her they hoped was to extend to all mankind. Southey turned out in later days the best of High Tories; and Coleridge, though he made so many fierce onslaughts upon Mr. Pitt in his belligerent days, was not of a spirit adapted for political partisanship. But at this early period they were all aflame for the great cause of Freedom—their enthusiasm unquenched even by the blood and carnage of the Reign of Terror. It was their opinion that all existing governments, and that of England above all, were rotten at the core; and their Pantisocracy, their ideal city, was not only a refuge for their own souls from the evil of the times, but intended to be a tremendous protest against England, in which her philosophical sons no longer found it possible to live.

The earlier career of these two visionaries (of whom the elder was but twenty-two) had been simple enough. Southey's progenitors and relations were people with some pretensions to gentility; and his own life, his parents being poor, had been spent under the protection of an eccentric aunt, whose house was his home, and of a benevolent absent uncle, who had undertaken the expense of his education. The aunt, Miss Tyler,

had been kept as long as possible in ignorance of the two great anticipations of her nephew's life, his intended emigration and marriage, and when she made the discovery her indignation and resentment were so great that Southey had to quit her house in the midst of a storm of rain, and to walk from Bristol to Bath, where his mother was: nor did he ever see the protector of his childhood again. This sudden abandonment threw him with double fervour into the brotherhood, already so close and intimate: he describes his condition as follows, with youthful grandiloquence, to the faithful friend, Grosvenor Bedford, who was the constant confidant of his troubles and joys, both now and during all his life:—

"There is the strangest mixture of cloud and sunshine. An outcast in the world, an adventurer living by his wits, yet happy in the full conviction of rectitude, in integrity, and in the affection of a mild and lovely woman; at once the object of hatred and admiration, wondered at by all, hated by the aristocrats—the very oracle of my own party! . . . Do not grieve that circumstances have made me thus; you ought to rejoice that your friend acts up to his principles, though you think them wrong. Coleridge is writing at this same table; our names are written in the book of destiny, on the same page."

One of the joint projects of the two youths, thus united by fate, was the publication of a magazine, "which we can undoubtedly make the best thing of the kind ever published;" but this did not at the moment come to anything. They had, indeed, a hundred plans; and that part of their time which was not devoted to schemes of intellectual advancement was devoted to love-making and projects of

another kind. "If Coleridge and I can get £150 *between us*, we propose marrying and retiring into the country, as our literary business can be carried on there, and practising agriculture, till we can raise the money for America, still the grand object in view," Southey says. It was the fashion of this age of friendships that the young poets should publish their productions jointly, two or three in one volume; and Coleridge went even farther than this, actually writing a portion of the "Joan of Arc," which was his friend's mainstay. Nevertheless clouds soon began to arise between them; the Pantisocracy grew doubtful to Southey very soon after he had spoken of it as "still the grand object in view." But it was the return of his uncle, Mr. Hill, the consular chaplain at Lisbon, which finally removed him from the agitated but delightful little society in Bristol. This kind relative had maintained him at school and college in the hope that his education would terminate decorously in orders and a good living. His after life proved that no career could have suited him better; but at this tumultuous period, when all the world was still seething with the strong excitement of the great Revolution, and all kinds of volcanic impulses were agitating young minds, he had no toleration for such an idea. Perhaps it is unjust to say, though Southey's son does not hesitate to say it, that his political views were such as "rarely fail to produce lax and dangerous views in religion;" but at least it is true enough that the tremendous innovations in politics which were being worked out in France, and which had

startled all Europe and stirred up every lingering doubt and question everywhere, gave double force to those instinctive rebellions and resistances which seem to be inherent in youth; and that the mere idea of authority, and of a settled and long-established order, was enough to turn aside the excited minds of the generation, which hoped for nothing less than new heavens and a new earth. Southey felt in this moment of ebullition,—he, the predestined churchman, the man of duty and obligation, born to re-adopt and cling to all the loyal prejudices of a conservative race, —that to take the vows of the Church upon him would be "perjury." Before leaving Oxford he had tried medicine, but shrank from the special studies of that grand but terrible profession with the sickening horror of an extremely sensitive mind and nature. The only profession that remained was the law, which he hated scarcely less; but he was reasonable even in the wildness of his youth, and felt that when it became necessary to meet his uncle some feasible way of turning his education to account must be settled upon. Mr. Hill came to England in the autumn of 1795. He was the only member of his family, now that his aunt was entirely alienated from him, who could be of any use to the young man, and his coming seems to have been looked for with natural anxiety and alarm. "Suspense shall be the subject of my tragedy," Southey cries on one occasion; "indeed I have often the heartache." But when the uncle came the youthful rebel was met with no reproaches. Mr. Hill was kind and judicious, and never seems to have

abandoned the blameless youth, whose very vagaries were virtuous. The only thing he insisted upon was that his nephew should go back with him to Lisbon for several months—one of those most natural and common domestic artifices by which imprudent attachments and objectionable associates are to be got rid of, as it is always hoped. No doubt the excellent chaplain, skilled in the fickle mind of youth, believed that all this effervescence of early folly would blow off (as it did, but not so easily), and that the change and novelty would soon empty his nephew's heart of the ineligible Edith and the unlucky "Muse."

It is curiously characteristic of Southey, who is the embodiment of the romantic-practical amid the vaguer poetical spirits of his brethren, that he should have taken a step which balked the good uncle's incipient plans before they had begun to be carried into execution. On the very day of his departure he married Edith Fricker. They parted at the church door—the bridegroom going off upon his travels, the bride, with her wedding-ring suspended by a ribbon round her neck, to the house of Cottle, always kind. "Never did man stand at the altar with such strange feelings," Southey says. "She returned the pressure of my hand, and we parted in silence." It was the maddest imprudence, for even the marriage fees and ring were paid with Cottle's money; yet there was the ring of the true mettle, the energy and life of a manly mind even in its folly—and of something better still, of the noble instincts of that supporting and protecting love of which he was an

embodiment all his life. It is evident that the Frickers were very poor. By marrying Edith, Southey made a provision for her instantly possible. When he had anything himself, he could share it with her according to the rights given him by that hurried ceremony; and "should I perish by shipwreck, or any other casualty," he says, "I have relations whose prejudices would then yield to the anguish of affection, and who would love and cherish and yield all possible consolation to my widow." This gives to the high-flown folly of the secret wedding a consecration and an excuse. Not only to Edith, the mild and lovely, but to all her family, the wives of the other Pantisocrats and poets, Southey was henceforth the fountain of succour and life.

"Joan of Arc" was published just as he sailed away, dull and wretched, hating the voyage, and not without a certain nervous apprehension of its physical risks. He had got fifty guineas for the poem from good Cottle, and indeed we think this was quite as much as it was worth. The mission of the peasant prophetess—revolt made into duty by religion and a commission from heaven—was the kind of subject above all others to suit his mind and creed; for, whatever wild ideas might possess him, his imagination was fundamentally religious, and the romantic traditions of the past had not ceased to affect his fancy, though his mind was penetrated by the brilliant hopes and fallacies of the moment. It suited Southey, therefore, to show how redemption came from the poor, the ignorant, and lowly, how the heart of

genius was stirred by the sight of the oppressed and slaughtered peasants, the young bridegroom, the father of little children, the widow's son, all sacrificed in odious war, while kings and nobles trifled and quarrelled, and let the humble masses pay for it with their blood. And the noble, pure, unworldly, Shepherd-Maiden, what poet is there who has not felt the fascination of her appearance amid all the dismal records of the wars? But Joan has not brought luck to her poets. The painful length of the tale, the long discourses put in, with a mistake which is so common in narrative poetry, just at the moment when action and not discourse is imperative, the turgid heaviness of these long-winded discourses themselves, the mingled and disordered romantic machinery which twists in two or three episodes of ordinary love-making with the course of the grander history, make the poem almost unreadable now. We do not know, indeed, who but a student would attempt it. "Wat Tyler," the curious little revolutionary sketch which Southey had written at a still earlier age, and which he was compelled to publish by the malice of ungenial critics, when he had altogether changed his opinions, has much more spirit and nature in it.

Coleridge had been trained in a harder school. Though he spoke with great tenderness of his family, he seems to have been singularly abandoned by them from his boyhood up. He was brought up at Christ's Hospital, working his way through hardships and miseries which it is painful to contemplate, and was sent to Cambridge afterwards, against his will, the

visionary boy with his multitudinous thoughts being too lawless and too individual to estimate the advantages of scholarship and classical education, though no scholar ever loved better the lore itself. At the University he had begun by gaining distinctions of the usual academic kind; but tiring suddenly of this adoption of other men's ways, or moved by pure waywardness and a desire to try a new order of unknown conditions, he went off in the midst of his career to London and enlisted in a cavalry regiment, calling himself Silas Titus Comberback, with boyish humour, yet loyal adherence to the "Es-tee-se" which had been his baby nickname. In his regiment, if we may trust Mr. Cottle, he entered with all the large sympathy that belonged to him into the new life so ill suited to his nature, and bewitched the troopers, as he did every company into which he ever drifted afterwards, with his golden mouth, his boundless interest in life, his power of interesting others, and his marvellous wealth of words. This strangest of freaks did not last very long, though authorities are divided as to how he got out of it: whether by the aid of his officers after an involuntary exhibition of learning, or in a still simpler way by the interference of his family, to whom his whereabouts was revealed by an acquaintance who met him accidentally. Of one thing we may be quite sure, that if this extraordinary sentry did hear an officer make an erroneous quotation, he would correct him without more ado, and probably discourse to him on the meaning of the passage, and all Euripides intended to put into it, with illus-

trations from the entire range of the Greek drama. The existence of a couple of young subalterns likely to quote Euripides to each other is, however, more unlikely.

After this escapade Coleridge returned for a time to Cambridge, then bethought him of Pantisocracy as a cure for all the ills of life, and wonderful provision for its future blessedness; and having the idea confirmed and strengthened in his mind by the faith and zeal of his disciples, expatiated upon it and enlarged it, till the liquid flowing Susquehannah became something real to him, and the colony in Bristol was as if it had already gotten to the other side. It was much the same to him, nay, perhaps better, to have it there in glowing theory,—theory far more perfect than any execution,—than to take the actual steps necessary for its transportation. But to Southey this was not equally satisfactory. The way in which these two appear in Mr. Cottle's book is very curious. Though he cannot help having a certain contempt for them, yet he had the greatest reverence for them. Coleridge, in particular, was a kind of inspired idiot to the bookseller. Southey's absurdity was not much more than was inevitable to youth; but Coleridge was the very type of that wonderful fool yet sage, that lamentable yet ineffable being with whom genius, and especially poetical genius, has always been identified. It was sufficient occupation for a bystander to listen to his magnificent plans, and to see their vanity: to note, half with anger, half with amusement, all his wiles and devices to elude actual work; and at the

same time to admire and applaud what, when "much enforced," he would produce at a venture, flashing forth with no trouble at all verses such as nobody else could invent of all the tuneful throng, and talk such as man had never talked before.

Coleridge would seem to have been entirely without friends, or any succour or help, or even communication with his family at this time. They had freed him from his soldiering; and perhaps this freak had disgusted the good people, for there is not the smallest further appearance of kindred in his life. And he was in all ways so much poorer than his friend Southey, that not only had he no kind uncle to make openings for him, but no "Joan of Arc" to prove at least his power of work. He had not even, like so many penniless sons of fame, the talisman in his pocket, the manuscript with which fate might be defied. He had neither money nor money's worth. A few fugitive poems, a few courses of lectures, some of them only in intention, a million of plans, one as good as the other, equally and impartially regarded by their inventor, who was ready to take up or lay down any of them at a moment's notice, and with no one but Cottle to whom he could look for aid, his prospect was sufficiently blank. And thereupon he married to mend matters! The foundation upon which he established a household is about the slightest that ever supported any such superstructure. "Aware of his narrow circumstances," Cottle says, "and to make his mind as easy in pecuniary affairs as the extreme case would permit, I thought it would

afford a small relief to tell him that I would give him a guinea and a half (after his volume was completed) for every hundred lines he might present to me, whether rhyme or blank verse. This offer appeared of more consequence in the estimation of Mr. Coleridge than it did in his who made it, for when a common friend asked him when married "How he was to keep the pot boiling?" he very promptly answered that "Mr. Cottle had made him such an offer that he felt no solicitude on the subject." He was but twenty-three, in all the chaos of youthful fancies, but confident and eloquent as always, full of novel ideas on every subject, and dazzling everybody with his genius, though he had done absolutely nothing to prove the possession of that indescribable inspiration which seems to have rayed out of him like light through a lantern. For one thing, the wants and requirements of the young couple were modest, if their temerity was great. Southey had considered the attainment of a hundred and fifty, or even a hundred, certain pounds a year between his friend and himself, enough to warrant the two marriages: and a guinea and a half for every hundred lines may have appeared an inexhaustible fortune to Coleridge. We feel almost disposed to utter a thanksgiving even now, that this liberal offer was not made to Southey before he set out upon his voyage, else how many hundreds, nay, hundreds of thousands, of meritorious, carefully-polished lines might we not have seen!

Coleridge took a cottage at Clevedon, on the muddy shore of the Bristol Channel, and here for a

short time he seems to have been as happy as ever imprudent lover was. The descriptions of the "pretty cot" and the "pensive Sara" who shared it are sweet and tranquil, as the sober certainty of bliss ought to be. Probably it was his first experience since his childhood of a home, and the unaccustomed charm held him happily captive. But the home was not very stationary; they went back to Bristol when the first enchantment was over, then to Nether Stowey, another village in Somersetshire. In the meantime, Coleridge started a little paper or weekly magazine, which was to be "undoubtedly the best thing of the kind ever published," as Southey had said. It was to contain the sublimest speculation and poetry, along with a weekly summary of news and debates; and Coleridge went about the country from town to town getting subscribers, varying his other occupations at the same time with that of a preacher. It was chiefly in Unitarian chapels that he preached, that vague and always intellectual sect having somehow attracted him during this misty period; and he appeared in the pulpit in coloured clothes, and occasionally discoursed upon such subjects as the Hair-powder Tax, to the consternation of his audience. Notwithstanding this curious choice of subject, his eloquence must have strongly affected the good provincial people whom he addressed, for it became some time after a question to be gravely debated in his life whether he should not settle down at Chursbury as a Socinian minister, a conclusion chiefly prevented by the Wedgewoods, Josiah and his brother, who offered him an annuity

of a hundred and fifty pounds a year that he might relinquish the project, and be able to devote himself to literary work. A second edition of his volume of poetry had likewise been called for, which by Cottle's liberality added a little more to his funds. But the *Watchman* proved an entire failure, two numbers only appearing, and these not paying their expenses —fatal drawback, for which no amount of genius can make up.

Before this timely succour arrived, however, it is worth while quoting his own account both of the state of mind in which he was, and his intentions for the future :—

"I verily believe no poor fellow's idea-pot ever bubbled up so vehemently with fears, doubts, and difficulties, as mine does at present. Heaven grant it may not boil over and put out the fire. I am almost heartless.[1] My past life seems to me as a dream, a feverish dream, all one gloomy huddle of strange actions and dim-discovered motives, friendship lost by indolence, and happiness murdered by mismanaged sensibility. The present hour I seem in a quickset hedge of embarrassments. For shame! I ought not to mistrust God; but, indeed, to hope is far more difficult than to fear. . . . A sort of calm hopelessness diffuses itself over my heart. Indeed, every mode of life which has promised me bread and cheese has been one after another torn away from me, but God remains. . . . There are some poets who write too much at their ease from the facility with which they please themselves. They do not often enough

"'Feel their burdened breast
Heaving beneath incumbent Deity.'

So that to posterity their wreaths will look miserably, here per-

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[1] This word seems to be used by both Southey and Coleridge in the sense of without heart, discouraged, disheartened, as we should say.

haps, an everlasting Amaranth, and close by its side some weed of an hour, sere, yellow, and shapeless. They rely too much on story and event, to the neglect of these lofty imaginings that are peculiar to, and definite of the poet. The story of Milton might be told in two pages. It is this which distinguishes an epic poem from a romance in metre. Observe the march of Milton, his severe application, his laborious polish, his deep metaphysical researches, his prayer to God before he began his great work: all that could lift and swell his intellect became his daily food. I should not think of devoting less than twenty years to an epic poem. Ten years to collect materials and to warm my mind with universal science. I would be a tolerable mathematician. I would thoroughly understand mechanics, hydrostatics, optics, and astronomy, botany, metallurgy, chemistry, geology, anatomy, medicine; then the mind of man; then the minds of men; in all travels, voyages, and histories. So I would spend ten years; the next five in the composition of the poem, and the five last in the correction of it. So would I write, haply not unhearing of that divine and nightly whispering voice which speaks to mighty minds of predestinated garlands, starry and unwithering."

It is fine to see the desponding poet forget himself and those little troubles about the bread and cheese, and rise to this great climax. No one yet, so far as we are aware, has ever prepared a great epic after this prescription; even Wordsworth, who has approached it most nearly, can scarcely be said to "have warmed his mind with universal science." But such a flash of purpose, lofty and ideal, comes, perhaps, more easily to those who make little attempt to carry their theories out, than to those who are seriously affected by them. We doubt, indeed, whether an epic which took twenty years' incubation would be worth the trouble; but not less fine was the vision of something great that some day might be

attained, or, at least, any day might be dreamt of, dilating the dreamy eyes, and expanding the full lips.

About this time another and a greater figure suddenly comes upon the scene. A young pair from the north country, brother and sister, he a young man of serious mind and aspect, she a delicate spirit, a sort of poetical Ariel; both of them overflowing with poetry and enthusiasm, had come to the neighbourhood some time before. They were orphans and had been long separated, and the pleasure of setting up a sort of home together, enhanced by the still greater pleasure of the discovery that each was to each the most congenial companion, filled their lives. Their means were as humble as those of the other young poets with whom they had not as yet been brought in contact, but more certain. Wordsworth had produced scarcely anything and earned nothing: but he had inherited from a friend a little fortune, £900, upon the interest of which he felt himself passing rich. And Dorothy had a hundred pounds of her own. What was wanted more to be happy? Why they left their native dales which they loved so faithfully, for that tamer coast, we are not told; but here they were, established near the sea, spending their poetic leisure in the open air, in their garden, in endless walks and talks, while the young fortunes of the Coleridges and Southeys were being decided on the other side of the county. Wordsworth, like the others, had no great heart for the academical life or learning. He had taken his degree, which neither of the others did, but he had brought

no distinctions with him from the University, a reflection which ought to teach these great bodies a certain humility. Wordsworth, however, had completed his education in a way which comparatively few men had attained to. In the long vacation of 1790, in the full fervour of the early revolution, he went to France, and saw with his own eyes the events which fired all Europe. Everybody now knows the lines in which he described the sentiment of the time.

> "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven, oh, times
> In which the meagre stale forbidding ways
> Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
> The attraction of a country in romance."

Nothing could be farther from the nature of this serious youth than the noise and din of revolution; but to him, as to so many others, the outburst of new principles and new life in France was like a new gospel. It is hard now, knowing all that followed, to appreciate rightly the wonderful and entrancing novelty of that revelation. It sounded like the sublimest lesson of Christianity made into a national code, and about to actuate all the movements of political life in which so different a principle had reigned in spite of Christianity. That all men were brothers had been feebly breathed in sermons for near two thousand years, but to hear it proclaimed from the throat of a whole people, a "unanimous hero nation," with no parable in it but a claim of irresistible and undoubted right, electrified every generous heart. Wordsworth landed in France on the eve of the day

when Louis XVI. took the oath of fidelity to the Constitution. He was not old enough or wise enough to see what dark and fatal forces were lurking underneath the popular joy. He accepted the code of freedom and brotherhood as he would have accepted the proclamation of a new and noble king whose right to the throne all acknowledged with acclamations, and whose reign was to bring in the golden age. Few, perhaps, of the hot politicians who were kindled by the news, received it with such profound belief, with such intense satisfaction, as this grave young observer, to whom all noble principles were kindred. France, to him, took in a moment that curious representative position among the nations which it has been her strange fate to occupy ever since. Political changes were the least of the great things which the vast assembly of visionary souls throughout Europe, who then fixed their attention upon her words and ways, and this young Englishman in particular, expected from her. She was the champion of humanity. She was the spiritual Quixote, the last and greatest of the knight-errants. The Bastille was not only one actual stronghold of tyrannical power, but the palpable image of all oppression overthrown. The poor prisoners who crept out dazzled to the eye of day were emblems of human faculties enslaved, and human hearts broken by tyranny, but now gloriously emancipated and restored for the use and service of the world. What was going on in Paris was for the instruction, for the warning and guidance of mankind, the first step of a new and happier history; and that great town itself

was but a stage on which the greatest of dramas was set forth in its first scene.

Wordsworth did not break out into revolutionary verse, nor did it occur to him to attempt to rouse his own country by any celebration of the old heroes of virtuous rebellion, as Southey did, whose mind was so much less moved than his. But after his first view of the riotous joy of France in her emancipation, he went back, at the earliest opportunity, drawn by an increasing fascination of interest in the great tragedy as it worked itself out, and inspired by an earnest and lofty curiosity which is most characteristic of him. He went and studied it, as afterwards he studied his mountains, wandering about, a deeply concerned, yet philosophical observer, through the flames and conflict. Even in the fervour of his youthful sympathy he was still a spectator, held back by an invisible bond of nature from all participation in the events which interested him so deeply. Not till long years after, when the play had been played out, and its hidden meanings revealed, did he put the narrative of his youthful investigation into words; and probably the grave tone of middle age modified that narrative unconsciously; but yet Wordsworth was always Wordsworth, and we recognise the sound of his young footstep, the familiar cadence of his voice amid the tumults which he mused upon. At the time it troubled him to feel that he was not sufficiently moved. When he picked up a stone of the Bastille to keep as a relic, he was conscious of a deficiency somewhere—

> "I looked for something that I could not find,
> Affecting more emotion than I felt."

and, bewildered by his own tranquillity, compared himself to a plant "glassed in a greenhouse"—

> "That spreads its leaves in unmolested peace,
> While every bush and tree, the country through,
> Is shaking to its roots."

Himself and his own individuality, and this calm atmosphere of spectatorship, accompanied him into the very midst of the flames, where he walked, and talked, and discussed all things with the young revolutionary General Beaupris "on the borders of the unhappy Loire," as if that river of blood had been a motionless tarn among his own mountains. When, however, the wandering observer found himself again in Paris, his composure gave way, and a troubled attempt to comprehend a hitherto unsuspected new meaning in the movement which he had hailed with so much sympathy, obscured his faculties. He stood on the scene of the September massacre a month after it happened, interrogating the very stones that had so lately run with blood, and gazing about him

> "As doth a man
> Upon a volume, whose contents he knows
> Are memorable, but for him locked up;
> Being written in a tongue he cannot read."

This brought him to a dead stop in his profound and anxious study. The mystery of this bloody interpolation into the tale of human enfranchisement and regeneration was beyond his power of solving. His

imagination yielded to the terror that was in the air. When he reached the high and lonely chamber in the roof, where his lodging was, he watched all night, trying to read by intervals, unable to sleep, thinking he heard a voice which cried aloud to the whole city, "Sleep no more!" and finding that the place, "all hushed and silent as it was," had become

> "Unfit for the repose of night,
> Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam."

It is a wonderful proof of the truthfulness with which Wordsworth, in the calm of after years, reported these sensations and convulsions of youth, that he does not represent himself as changed in his opinion of the main question at issue, even by contact with those terrible consequences of it. Though the carnage was a mystery and distress to him, and his spirit was overclouded and driven out of the easy certainty of youth by this revelation of cruelties and savage forces unthought of, yet he did not change in his conviction that France, in her passion and agony, was still accomplishing the highest of missions. "From all doubt," he says,

> "Or trepidation of the end of things,
> Free was I as the angels are from guilt."

So profound was this faith, that when he returned home and found England excited by discussions about the slave trade (not to speak of the "Hair-powder Tax" on which Coleridge discoursed to his astonished audience), he dismissed the subject almost with contempt, in the strength of his conviction, that if

France and the cause of freedom in her prospered, all other questions were involved in that great one, and universal setting right of all wrongs must follow as an inevitable consequence. And when in the process of time the young poet found his own country joined in the alliance against the great rebel of Europe, his dismay and despair had impassioned vent—

> "No shock
> Given to my inmost nature had I known
> Down to that very moment,"

he cried out with sharp pain. No prayer for the success of England, no thanksgiving for her victories, could cross his lips. He saw the expeditions fitted out, the fleets ready to sail, with tears of indignant passion, "Oh, pity and shame!" he exclaimed. To him this intervention of England in the affairs of the world, so potential as it turned out to be, so great a subject of national pride as it has been since, was an act which "tore away"

> "By violence at our decision, rent
> From the best youth in England their dear pride,
> Their joy in England."

This was the opinion of all, at least, of the poets of the time and many of its most serious thinkers. Few, if any, voices now living would echo these indignant complaints. We may doubt whether the expedition to the Crimea was entirely heroic and wise, as we follow, with a painful and ashamed sense of our national deficiencies, Mr. Kinglake's great philosophical history, so different from all other martial records.

But we have no doubt now of the greatness of English action and influence in the beginning of the century, or of the noble part our country then played in the world. To be sure, the protesters changed their opinion when Napoleon arose, the enemy of freedom as well as of Europe. But at the beginning, notwithstanding all the blood that had tarnished the progress of the revolution,—the murdered king and queen, the guillotine, and all its attendant horrors,—it is curious to be thus brought in sight of the strenuous opposition of "the best youth in England," recorded so long after, and with such seriousness, by one of the least revolutionary of men.

This was the young man whom Coleridge, in all the visionary chaos of his thousand plans, had suddenly stumbled upon. Wordsworth had been thrown all astray in his life by that strange revolution episode—an episode which, notwithstanding much change of opinion, had the greatest lifelong effect upon his works. He had come to that moment of doubt as to what was to become of him, which occurs to so many young men after their early training is over. But already, like all young men of genius, he had found, among his contemporaries, admirers and believers — and one of these, Raisley Calvert, the friend with whom he had travelled, left him at his death a sum of money, expressly with the understanding that it was to enable him to exercise "powers and attainments which might be of use to mankind." On receiving this bequest, Wordsworth, as has been said, took his only sister Dorothy from their uncle's house,

and the two went forth together in that delightful union of brother and sister, which is, when it implies such perfect sympathy and agreement as existed between these two, one of the most exquisite of relationships. They took a house called Racedown Lodge, near Crewkerne, on the borders of Dorset and Somerset—"the place dearest to my recollection in the whole world," Miss Wordsworth writes. "It was the first home I had." Without taking his sister into consideration, no just idea can be formed of Wordsworth. He was, as it were, henceforward the spokesman to the world of two souls. It was not that she visibly and consciously aided or stimulated him, but that she was a part of him, a second pair of eyes to see, a second and more delicate intuition to discern. This union was so close, that in many instances it becomes difficult to distinguish which is the brother and which the sister. She was part not only of his life but of his imagination. He saw by her, felt through her, at her touch the strings of the instrument began to thrill, the great melodies awoke. Her journals are Wordsworth in prose, just as his poems are Dorothy in verse. The one soul kindled at the other. These two young poets took up their life together in an idyllic purity of happiness which it is delightful to think of. No warmer wishes were theirs—the world was far from them and all its concerns. The mornings and evenings, the sunsettings and dews, the sky and atmosphere, were their study, the occupation of their life. Why those children of the mountains should have chosen a scene so unlike that which was

native to them, we are not told—but here they had lived for two long years, happy upon their tiny income, in each other's society, when Coleridge was wafted their way by a chance breeze from heaven, or kind suggestion of some wayfaring angel. It is to be supposed that more earthly means of introduction were employed, and it is even suggested that the two poets had made each other's acquaintance some time before; but they came together and formed a real and instantaneous alliance at the house of Racedown early in 1797. "At first I thought him very plain, that is for about three minutes," Dorothy Wordsworth says. "He is pale, thin, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish loose-growing, half-curling, rough black hair. But if you hear him speak for five minutes you think no more of them." It is clear from every testimony that Coleridge thus carried his charter of genius openly displayed wherever he went. No one could be in any doubt about him. "His forehead was broad and high, light, as if built of ivory, with large projecting eyebrows, and his eyes rolling beneath them like a sea with darkened lustre," says Hazlitt. He "dissipated all doubts on the subject by beginning to talk. He did not cease while he stayed, nor has he since that I know of." At no time of his life did Coleridge require to carry any proofs of his genius about with him, but it is all the more wonderful that it should have been so universally acknowledged at this period, since his little volume published by Cottle had given little indication of it. Nor was there much in the volume of "Descriptive

Sketches," tame and smooth, which Wordsworth had already put forth. But they recognised each other on the spot.

And from the moment of the meeting the very atmosphere seems to grow luminous about these two great figures,—the group which Dorothy, all soul and emotion, the most wonderful of sympathetic hearers, made complete. The youthful sublimity and delight of the encounter are mingled with a youthful exaggeration and absurdity which must conciliate the hardest critic. The first evening they spent together is described by Dorothy. "The first thing," she says, "that was read after he came was William's new poem, the 'Ruined Cottage' (afterwards embodied in the first book of the Excursion—the story of Margaret), "with which he was much delighted; and after tea he repeated to us two acts and a half of his tragedy 'Osorio.' The next evening William read his tragedy, 'The Borderers'." This sudden plunge ten fathom deep into the silver sea of poetry is portentous, yet delightful. Wordsworth was no critic, and never seems to have known the sublime from the matter-of-fact in his own work, but it is a curious evidence of the incompetence of even the most delicate of critical faculties, when disturbed by influences either of *amour propre* or friendly enthusiasm, that Coleridge should not have discerned any special difference between the wonderful reality and original power of the first of these poems and the commonplace verse of the tragedy. But though much of what they thus

communicated to each other has dropped from the records of fame, it does not less interest us to know that each discovered in the other, with genuine enthusiasm, those secret signs of brotherhood which are more potent than the ties of nature. Nothing could be more interesting than such a meeting. Wordsworth was twenty-seven, his new friend two years younger, and great as their after achievements were, no doubt there shone before them in the golden mists of these early days many an impossible triumph such as earthly powers have never yet realised. They walked about together over the downs, with their heads in the clouds, disclosing all their hopes and dreams to each other, visionary philosophers full of the highest thoughts, as well as poets with the vision and the faculty divine in their youthful eyes. Half spectator, half inspirer, the deep-eyed rapid girl between heard, and saw, and felt, and enhanced every passing thought and emotion; and with an enthusiasm which borders on extravagance, they divined, and understood, and celebrated each other. "He is a wonderful man," Dorothy wrote; "his conversation teems with soul, and mind, and spirit." Coleridge, on his part, describes "Wordsworth and his exquisite sister" with equal fervour. "I speak with heartfelt sincerity, and I think unblinded judgment, when I tell you that I feel a small man by his side," he writes; and of Dorothy he adds, "In every motion her innocent soul outbeams so brightly, that who saw her would think guilt was a thing impossible to her. Her information is various,

her eye watchful in observation of nature, and her taste a perfect electrometer." It is curious that Coleridge should have embodied part of these words in his description of Joan of Arc—whether he was quoting from the already published text, or if he afterwards added them in his numerous revisions, it is difficult to say.

This rapid conquest of each other made by the three friends advanced so quickly, that in a month after the beginning of their acquaintance, the Wordsworths removed from Racedown to a house called Alfoxden, near Nether Stowey, in which village Coleridge was living—"our principal inducement being Coleridge's society." Here they lived in the closest intercourse, making plans and verses enough to fill the whole air with echoes.

> "Upon smooth Quantock's airy ridge we roam'd,
> Unchecked, or loitered 'mid his sylvan combs;
> Thou in bewitching words with happy heart
> Didst chant the vision of that ancient man,
> The bright-eyed mariner, and rueful woes
> Didst utter of the Lady Christabel—
> And I, associate with such labours, steeped
> In soft forgetfulness the livelong hours,
> Murmuring of him who, joyous hap, was found
> After the perils of his moonlight ride
> Near the loud waterfall: or her who sate
> In misery near the miserable Thorn."

Hazlitt's account of the pair of poets and the intercourse in which they lived,—a kind of Apostolic life having all things poetical in common,—affords so complete a picture of their intercourse, and of the real

beginnings of their memorable works, that it is indispensable here.

"In the afternoon Coleridge took me over to Alfoxden, a romantic old family mansion of the St. Aubins, where Wordsworth lived. It was then in the possession of a friend of the poet's, who gave him the free use of it. Wordsworth himself was from home, but his sister kept house, and set before us a frugal repast, and we had free access to her brother's poems, the 'Lyrical Ballads,' which were still in manuscript. I dipped into a few of these with great satisfaction and with the faith of a novice." . . . Next "morning, as soon as breakfast was over, we strolled out into the park, and seating ourselves on the trunk of an old ash tree, Coleridge read aloud, with a sonorous and musical voice, the ballad of 'Betty Foy.' I was not critically or sceptically inclined. I saw touches of truth and nature, and took the rest for granted. But in the 'Thorn,' the 'Mad Mother,' and the 'Complaint of a poor Indian Woman,' I felt that deeper power and pathos which have since been acknowledged as the characteristics of this author, and the sense of a new style and a new spirit in poetry came over me. It had to me something of the effect that arises from the turning up of fresh soil, or of the first welcome breath of spring. .Coleridge and myself walked back to Stowey that evening, and his voice sounded high

"'Of providence, fore-knowledge, will, and fate,
Fix'd fate, free will, fore-knowledge absolute.'

"He lamented that Wordsworth was not prone enough to belief in the traditional superstitions of the place, and that there was a something corporeal, a matter-of-factness, a clinging to the palpable or often to the petty in his poetry, in consequence. . . . He said, however, if I remember right, that this objection must be confined to his descriptive pieces, that his philosophic poetry had a grand and comprehensive spirit in it, so that his soul seemed to inhabit the universe like a palace, and to discover truth by intuition rather than by deduction. . . . We went over to Alfoxden again the day following, and Wordsworth read us the story of 'Peter Bell' in the open air. There is a

chant in the recitation both of Coleridge and Wordsworth, which acts as a spell upon the hearer and disarms the judgment. Perhaps they have deceived themselves by making habitual use of this ambiguous accompaniment. Coleridge's manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained, and internal. Coleridge has told me that he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copsewood, whereas Wordsworth always composed walking up and down a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruptions."

Thus the two poets came to the edge of their first joint publication, a book which, amid all its manifold imperfections, its presumptions, and assumptions, was yet to give the world assurance of two new lights of the greatest magnitude in its firmament. They had, as we have said, all things in common; the "Lyrical Ballads" were the family store to which the young visitor had "free access" as to the bread and butter which Dorothy served him. To take a poem out of the stock, and read it aloud as they sat on the fallen ash tree in these long sweet summer afternoons, was the natural entertainment. What did it matter which of the two communicated that pleasure? It was "Betty Foy," not the "Ancient Mariner," that Coleridge read; but the "Ancient Mariner," too was getting itself chanted forth to the accompaniment of all the winds and storms that swept the seas, and to the sweeter cadence of the rippling calm. As they walked about "for miles and miles on the brown heaths overlooking the Channel," the happy youth, thus admitted into the poet's confidence, "pointed out to Coleridge's notice

the bare masts of a vessel on the very edge of the horizon, and within the red-orbed disk of the setting sun, like his own spectre ship in the "Ancient Mariner." Who can doubt that the poet had seen it already, and many a wonder more?

In the meantime Southey had come home, and had begun the course of industry and continuous work from which he never deviated all his after-life. He got employment on the Reviews and newspapers, he wrote and published "Letters from Portugal," he planned innumerable works. Complaining of his dislike to "desultory topics," he reveals his own love of the gigantic with curious simplicity and the same absence of all critical perception in respect to his own works which we have noted in his greater brethren. "Joan of Arc," he says, "was a whole—it was something to think of at every moment of solitude, and to dream of at night; my heart was in the poem; I threw my own feelings into it in my own language, ay, and out of one part of it and another you may find my own character. Seriously, to go on with Madoc is *almost* necessary to my happiness; I had rather leave off eating than poetising." But now these big works had no longer the assistance of Coleridge's enthusiasm and co-operation. There was not apparently any severance of friendship; they had quarrelled, but had been reconciled; and the transference of Charles Lloyd, a young man of wealth and weakness, a poet in his way, who had for some time lived at Nether Stowey with Coleridge, helping to keep the house by the allowance made for his board—

to Southey's household instead, was not an element of harmony; but there seems to have been no positive breach. However, Southey expunged the portion written by Coleridge from his "Joan of Arc," and Coleridge threw himself entirely into the society of Wordsworth, publishing conjointly with him. He had a tendency always to unite his friends with himself in his books. Poems, both by Charles Lloyd, his temporary companion, and by his old and faithful friend Charles Lamb, whose delicate and delightful personality ought to have come into this sketch ere now, were mingled, to the confusion of editors, in his second volume of poetry. His conjunction with Wordsworth went so far as interlineation. It seems to have been a necessity of his nature to weave himself in with some more steady, more deeply-rooted being.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LYRICAL BALLADS.

This conjoint volume was published in September 1798. It was the product of those wonderful roamings over "smooth Quantock's airy ridge," and all the long intercourse of the endless summer days, when Coleridge wove the most wonderful dream-tissues of his genius, and Wordsworth produced so much that was immortal —and something, too, that was not worthy of immortality. The book was received by the world not as the revelation of two new poets, but as something like an insult to its own fine taste and lofty standards of excellence. A shout of derision rose from all the critics; and England in general can scarcely be said to have been less than personally offended by this serious and almost solemn attempt to impose a new poetical creed upon her. Few abortive publications have ever raised so great a ferment—for it could not at first be called anything but abortive. The book was so badly received, and sold so poorly, that when Cottle—always generous, who had given Wordsworth thirty guineas for it, his usual measure of what poetic genius was worth—sold his copyrights to Longman in London shortly after, he found that this was considered as of

no value at all, and restored it to its original owners. Yet this was the volume which contained the "Ancient Mariner," a poem in which there was no insulting assault upon poetic diction, or selection of the prosaic and colloquial in language, but which seems to have been passed over in the ferment raised about Alice Fell's torn cloak, and the other familiarities of the volume. We cannot venture to say now that the critics had not some excuse. The book was a challenge and a defiance. The young writer was bent not only upon instructing mankind, which was a legitimate aim, by the real message which he had to deliver, but on revolutionising the very form and fashion under which poetry had hitherto addressed the world. It was a fantastic as well as a presumptuous attempt; and though one poet was the chief offender, the system had been settled upon after numberless discussions between the two, who combined with the fervour of their personal convictions a contempt for the opinion of the public, which was heightened by confidence in its inevitable docility and submission, one time or another, to themselves, its natural leaders. They knew, and were rather pleased to think, that the critics would be puzzled and startled; but they did not perceive how likely such an attempt was to run into extravagance, or how good taste and good sense might both be sacrificed to the polemics of the effort. Coleridge has given us, in his *Biographia Literaria*, an elaborate description of their scheme. It was to be "a series of poems, of two sorts."

"In the one the incidents and agents were to be in part at

least supernatural, and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class subjects were to be chosen from actual life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves. In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical Ballads, in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object to give the charm of novelty to the things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us—an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes and see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand."

These ostentatiously simple means of awakening the public suffered the fate of all that is artificial and factitious. To begin a serious and affecting poem thus—

"A little child, dear brother Jim,"

which was, as originally written, the first line (afterwards left incomplete) of "We are Seven;" to concentrate the interest of a first volume of poetry in a long-winded production like the "Idiot Boy;" to introduce into serious verse

"A household tub, like one of those
Which women use to wash their clothes,"

were sins for which there is very little excuse, and which mere rebellion against the hackneyed medium of poetic diction, of which Cowper and Burns had already broken the spell, does not justify. And when we see that this was not done accidentally but with serious intention, and from a height of superiority, as if something sacred and sublime was in the narrative of Johnny's ride and Harry Gill's shivering, the indignation of the public strikes us as not without reason. This foolish and quite unnecessary attempt was insisted upon as the very essence and soul of his mission by Wordsworth himself, until maturing years improved his perceptions and his taste. Nothing could be more distinctly characteristic of the curious self-absorption of his nature. He was a law to himself; the example of all older poetry and the opinion of the world were nothing to him until time had gradually revealed the fact, which is so often imperceptible to youth, that all things are not equally important; that in poetry, as in life, there are different magnitudes, and that the fullest truth to nature does not demand a slavish adherence to fact. What he intended to demonstrate was, that the feelings of Betty Foy, while her boy was lost, were as deep and tragical, and as worthy of revelation to the world, as would have been those of a queen; and there is no doubt that this is perfectly true: the idea that any one would have ventured to assert the contrary existed only in Wordsworth's fancy. But the choice of such colloquial familiarity

of treatment as suggests a jocular rather than a serious meaning, the absolute insignificance of the incident, and the absence of any attempt to give grace and dignity to the story, balked its effect completely as an exposition of nature, while the humour in it was too feeble, too diffuse, to give it a lively comic interest. Cowper had ventured to be quite as colloquial and realistic in John Gilpin, with electrical effect; but then the spirit and pure fun of that performance were inimitable, whereas Wordsworth's fun never rose above a tame reflective banter. Thus in his longest poem he failed, and failed utterly, in the very purpose which he had taken up with such fanatic enthusiasm, and determination to convince and proselytise. He did not "give the charm of novelty to the things of every day," nor "excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural by awaking the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us." This was what he had undertaken to do; and we do not wonder that the world, always more eager to seize upon a visible failure than to hail a modest success, should have received his high profession with incredulity and even with scoffing. What he did succeed in doing was to give such evidences of his real genius, that, some choice spirits at once, and by slow degrees the general public, learnt to appreciate it, in spite of the fictitious swaddling bands in which it had been his caprice to bind it; but this was a very different issue from that which Wordsworth intended and desired.

We may therefore freely acknowledge that the

world was not likely to derive any altogether new revelation of human nature, or even to acquire a deeper insight into those manifestations which it saw daily, by means of Betty Foy and Susan Gale. This was a mistake, and a presumptuous mistake, one of the follies of the wise, which are more foolish than the unconscious imbecilities of nature. But alongside of this failure, and even within it, there appeared certain brief and delicate studies of humanity which no true soul could disdain. The child who "lightly draws her breath, and feels her life in every limb," dwelling in angelic simplicity on the borders of the unseen, and knowing no reason for that blank barrier between, which our less keen faculties come to so dead a pause before—and the fanciful and innocent philosopher, grave in his little fiction, as if it were the solemnest truth, who justifies his preference of one place over another by the first external circumstance that catches his eye, "at Kilve there was no weather-cock:" were revelations of a very different kind from that of the "Idiot Boy," made without any ostentation of homeliness, with all the grace and sweetness of spontaneous verse; yet certainly calculated to awake "the mind's attention," and disclose the deeper things of nature lying under our very eyes, but so little noted. No one till then, not Shakspeare himself, had so revealed that simplest yet most complex germ of humanity, separated from us by a distinction more subtle than any which exists between rich and poor, yet entirely intelligible to us—the mind of a child. The poet, however, would scarcely seem to have been aware that in this way, and

not in the other, he was carrying out his promise, by no forced lowliness of subject or diction, but by the penetration of a new and tender insight. In something of the same way he here begins to open up those associations of the mind with natural objects which were henceforward to take so great a place in his philosophy. Burns's "Mouse" and his "Daisy" had given a width of pathetic meaning to the humblest objects, but this was rather by a humanising of the little "timorous cowering beastie," and the crushed flower, than by that luminous contemplation which, without changing in the least degree the outward object, takes it into the human bosom, and makes it a source of gladness or instruction. We cannot better instance this great and novel power than by one of the most lovely of Wordsworth's smaller poems :—

"I wander'd lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

"Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretch'd in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

"The waves beside them danced, but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee :—
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:

I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth this show to me had brought:

"For oft when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude,
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils."[1]

Nothing can be more different from this than a flower which is made the type and emblem of human circumstances: "such is the fate of artless maid." No moral reflection, no lesson is in it. It is but a perception, a seeing of something simple and common, yet too delicate and refined to be so much as thought of by the crowd—of the manner in which scenes and accidents of nature enter into us, are hung like pictures upon the walls of our secret chambers, and live to refresh us and recreate us, the most inalienable of all possessions for ever. Here was indeed a stirring of "the lethargy of custom," a thought that might be allowed "to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural;" for every musing mind must have felt that its inner pleasures were thus divined, and another happiness added to the list of those for which a man might hope.

But these lovely snatches of profound and simple

[1] The poem which we had quoted at random was, as the writer finds on examination, written at a later period. Others, however, to which our remarks will equally apply, will be found in the volume of Lyrical Ballads; but as this is perhaps the most perfect and the most simple example of one of Wordsworth's noticeable qualities, we prefer to let it stand as the illustration of these remarks.

thought were perhaps too brief and unobtrusive to catch at the first glimpse the public eye, and all were lumped up together in the indiscriminate opprobrium called forth by the inane simplicities of "Goody Blake" and "Betty Foy." What is still more memorable, however, is the fact that the poet himself seems to have been unaware of the difference between them. In the confusion of his youth, amid all the tumult of rising and developing powers, he knew no more than his audience did which was the true and which the fictitious metal; nay, it would almost seem that the inferior work appeared to him more important and better than the best. He tells us with simple elation, speaking of the "Idiot Boy"—"This long poem was composed in the groves of Alfoxden almost extempore, not a word, I believe, being corrected, though one stanza was omitted. I mention this in gratitude to those happy moments, for in truth I never wrote anything with so much glee." This curious boyish simplicity, delighted with the thought that its production was "almost extempore," and that not a word was corrected, blunts the edge of the critic's comment, and melts him into indulgence. It is doubly strange and doubly startling to find so singular a delusion in the mind of one who was so deep a student of his own nature, and had already so high a theory of his mission and work. But there are other traces besides this of Wordsworth's youthfulness. The "dear brother Jim" of "We are Seven" was added in the spirit of sheer nonsense, at Coleridge's urgent prayer. "We all enjoyed the joke of putting in our friend James

Tobin's name," says Wordsworth, with a boyish delight in mischief, though he objected to the rhyme as ridiculous. That two of the greatest figures in modern literature should thus disport themselves is the most wonderful evidence of that love of fun which exists in every wholesome youthful breast: but to play such tricks with the public was not respectful to that great power, which is the final judge of all excellence, and which exceedingly resented the liberty. There were people, indeed, who thought the whole volume a hoax, and who, between the bewildering mysteries of the "Ancient Mariner" and the wordy foolishness of "Betty Foy," believed nothing less than that they were being laughed at—a result which was the fault of the poets, and not of their astonished audience.

This curious mixture of success and failure appears in about exactly the same proportions in the longer poem produced at the same time, and intended for publication in this volume, the story of "Peter Bell." Here once more the poet breaks down in what he means to be the most important part of his work, and is brilliantly successful at a point which he has considered but little. We know no description of the kind which can bear comparison with the first part of "Peter Bell." The sketch of the potter is one of those extraordinary pictures which, once produced, nothing can obliterate. It is simple fact, true to the individual man in outward appearance, temper, manners, and character, as if it had been a photograph; and at the same time it is absolute truth, embracing a

whole race of men, transcending the little limits of the generations, true to-day, and to the end of the world. Nor is it the portrait of the potter alone which is set before us. With a subtle skill, the poet brings in himself, with all his fine perceptions, the vision and faculty divine that is in his own eyes and soul, as painters sometimes put in a tender and visionary background to throw up and bring into full relief the figure that occupies the front of the picture. A certain unexpressed surprise at the thing he has called into being, and comparison of this strange ruffian with himself, is, we can see, visible all through in Wordsworth's thoughts, a comparison which makes him both smile and sigh; that such a being should breathe while the other kind, the species of himself, was still existing, how wonderful! Then, with a half-humorous, half-melancholy minuteness, he shows us in glimpses that world so lovely to himself which surrounds the unawakened soul—the hamlets which lie deep and low, each "beneath its little patch of sky and little lot of stars," the tender grass "leading its earliest green along the lane," the primrose, which is nothing but a yellow primrose to Peter, the soft blue sky melting through the high branches on the forest's edge. All this rises before us, while Peter, unconcerned and rude, leading his lawless life in the midst, roving among the vales and streams, sleeping beside his asses on the hills, couched on the warm heath, below the sunshine or under the trees, and neither noticing nor caring, trudges through the landscape with the surly half-contempt of his kind.

"Though Nature could not touch his heart
By lovely forms, and silent weather,
And tender sounds, yet you might see
At once, that Peter Bell and she
Had often been together.

"A savage wildness round him hung
As of a dweller out of doors:
In his whole figure and his mien
A savage character was seen
Of mountains and of dreary moors.

"To all the unshaped half-human thoughts
That solitary Nature feeds
'Mid summer storms or winter's ice,
Had Peter joined whatever vice
The cruel city breeds.

"His face was keen as is the wind
That cuts along the hawthorn fence;
Of courage you saw little there,
But, in its stead, a medley air
Of cunning and of impudence.

"He had a dark and sidelong walk,
And long and slouching was his gait;
Beneath his looks so bare and bold,
You might perceive his spirit cold
Was playing with some inward bait.

"His forehead wrinkled was and furred;
A work one half of which was done
By thinking of his 'whens' and 'hows;'
And half, by knitting of his brows,
Beneath the glaring sun.

"There was a hardness in his cheek,
There was a hardness in his eye,
As if the man had fixed his face,
In many a solitary place,
Against the wind and open sky."

Thus, this portrait is made to expound not only the feelingless and rude character of the subject, but at the same time the poetic nature which has conceived it. It is the most forcible representation of what is by what is not, and suggestion of a whole world of beauty and meaning, by the distinct embodiment of a sphere in which these qualities are altogether absent, which ever was executed. The force of the picture lies not in sympathy, but antipathy, the writer and his theme standing, as it were, at the opposite poles of existence. But when the reader turns from this wonderful beginning to the "tale," so called, that follows, he is brought down into dulness and failure with all the luckless force of gravitation, falling like Lucifer from heaven into unspeakable depths. How Peter found an ass upon the banks of the "murmuring river Swale"; how the ass,

> "With motion dull,
> Upon the pivot of its skull
> Turned round his long left ear";

how he then gave forth, and prolonged to all the echoes,

> "Most ruefully a deep-drawn shout,
> The hard dry see-saw of his terrible bray";

how Peter, stopped in his first delighted intention of stealing the beast, discovered the corpse of the pedlar who owned him in the water, and, struck to the heart by the poor animal's faithfulness, was guided by it to the poor man's cottage, carrying the news of his death to his wife and children; and how the stillness

and solemnity of the night, and the strange adventure, so wrought upon him that he

> "Forsook his crimes, renounced his folly,
> And, after ten months' melancholy,
> Became a good and honest man";

is told in page after page of confused and tedious verse, to which even the measure and cadence, so finely adapted to the clear-cut lines of the previous description, is prejudicial, chopping up the story into small morsels, and dissipating the interest—such as it is. No deterioration could be more marked. The beginning is instinct with life and meaning, while all that follows is meandering, diffuse, and obscure—the one a model of continuous thought and happy expression, the other strained into ludicrous simplicity and faithfulness to fact, provoking laughter when it means to be solemn, yet never bold and strong enough to rise into true humour. We reach the climax of strange confusion when we read the poet's own account of the newspaper anecdote which suggested the poem, and of his close study at Alfoxden of the "habits, traits, and physiognomy of asses." "I have no doubt," he adds, "that I was put upon writing the poem of Peter Bell out of liking for the creature that is so often dreadfully abused." Thus his intention was, to make his tale about an uncouth ruffian and a drowned pedlar a triumphant proof of the power of poetry to instruct the world by the meanest subjects; and to turn something still less dignified and romantic than an idiot, an ass, into the

hero of the epic. In this project he completely failed; but here genius stepping in set the balance right, and by the way, without any set purpose or heroic meaning, betrayed him into that picture of the wild tramp and wanderer which can never die. We fear, however, so irredeemable is the tale, that it is only the sworn disciples of Wordsworth who have ever been fully aware of this jewel in the toad's head, this matchless preface to a performance, for which, as a whole, no one but a fanatic could find anything to say.

The contribution of the other member of the poetical partnership to the "Lyrical Ballads" was in itself much more memorable than anything produced by Wordsworth—though the attention of the public never seems to have been attracted by it, and criticism passed it over in delighted perception of the opportunities of slaughter afforded by the other. The allotment of the supernatural and mysterious to himself is accounted for by Coleridge in curious apparent unconsciousness of any bias in himself towards that sphere of poetical contemplation, by purely arbitrary reasons. In the long walks and talks which the Wordsworths and he took together, one of the chief interests of the beautiful landscape which they surveyed from "Quantock's airy ridge," was the constant change of light and colour flitting over it, the rhythmic flight of the shadows and vicissitudes of the atmosphere. "The sudden charm which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sunshine, diffused over a familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practi-

cability of combining" those two distinct forces in poetry which they were so fond of discussing—"the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature—and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination." Wordsworth's part was that of the sunshine, dwelling upon and bringing out into brilliant prominence the minutest detail of some certain spot in the valley or slopes below. And Coleridge, with a readiness which was half loyal submission and half that consciousness of unbounded faculty which made him so fertile in plans of every kind, took up the other, because it was left to him by the distinct natural bias of his companion. Such at least is the natural inference to be drawn from his own account of the matter. And up to this time Coleridge had shown no special inclination towards the supernatural ; his poems had been, like his friend's, descriptive, with an admixture of high moral sentiment and reflection, but nothing more—when they were not fiercely political, and concerned with the passions of the day. Even when he helped to celebrate the inspired Maiden, the heroine of France, no native instinct seems to have led him to the means of her inspiration, the heavenly voices and visions to which he could have lent a mystic form and reality. He took up this sphere of poetry now, because, it would seem, the other was manifestly preoccupied, and one thing was as easy as another to his many-sided soul. Never perhaps was the preordained instrument put into a great singer's hands in a manner more accidental.

For his own part he did not much care which it was; he was as ready to have plunged into science, into metaphysics, or politics. But in the meantime, as the supernatural was wanted to throw up and complete the real, the supernatural was the subject he adopted. His attitude is like that of a man groping in the darkness for his tools, and finding them by heavenly guidance, without any prevision or pre-inclination of his own.

It was in pursuance of this plan that the "Ancient Mariner" was composed—in those very woods of Alfoxden perhaps, where Wordsworth, with a beatitude which half angers, half amuses the reader, was crooning over the endless verses of "Betty Foy": or on the road between that poetical place and the cottage at Nether Stowey, a road which led over the brown downs, from which the poet, as we know, could see, by times a spectral ship gliding athwart the setting sun, or the pilot's boat pushed out upon the crisp morning waves for the guidance of the homeward bound. We can almost perceive the mariner's mystic progress shaping itself, as in all moods and tempers the poet looks forth upon the sea, and beholds in imagination not only the lighthouse tower, the kirk and the bay, but all the wide-spreading wastes of water beyond the firmament, and the wonders that may be passing there. Perhaps some white gull winging across the darkness of a storm cloud suggested to him the bird "that made the wind to blow"—the friendly wild companion of the seamen's course that

"Every day for food and play
Came to the mariner's hollo";

perhaps to himself, straying along with his head in the clouds, the sight of it was like that of "a Christian soul," whom he hailed in God's name; perhaps the crack of some heartless rifle, the sudden drop through the gloomy air of the innocent winged brother thus met on the way, sent his indignant imagination forth to conceive what punishment he should deserve who thus sent out of happy life a fellow creature who meant him nothing but friendship. And thus day by day, as he went and came, the seas would render up their secrets, and Nature's revenge for her child extend into all the weird and mysterious consequences of man's breach of faith with the subject-creation. Neither the poet himself nor his companions seem to have perceived the extraordinary superiority of this wonderful conception to the other poems with which it was published; for not only was its subject much more elevated, but it possessed in fact all the completeness of execution and faithfulness to its plan, which they failed in. While Wordsworth represented the light in the landscape chiefly in his imitation of the prominence sometimes given by the sunshine to the most insignificant spot, Coleridge carried out the similitude on his side with a faithfulness of the grandest kind. Like a great shadow moving noiselessly over the widest sweep of mountain and plain, a pillar of cloud—or like the flight of indescribable fleecy hosts of winged vapours spreading their impalpable influence like a breath, changing the face

of the earth, subduing the thoughts of men, yet nothing, and capable of no interpretation—such was the great poem destined to represent in the world of poetry the effect which these mystic cloud-agencies have upon the daylight and the sky. The life of every day is going on gaily, the wedding guests are close to the festal doors, when Mystery and Wonder suddenly interpose in the way, shutting out everything else around. The sounds of the other existence are heard through them, and even by glimpses that life is visible — the merry minstrels "nodding their heads," the bride in her blushes—but the unwilling listener has entered into the shadow, and the unseen has got hold of him. It is a parable, not only of the ship and the albatross (which is hard of interpretation), but of mankind, a stranger upon earth, "moving about in worlds not realised," always subject to be seized upon by powers unknown to which he is of kin, though he understands them not. "There is more of the invisible than the visible in the world, *plures esse Naturas invisibiles quam visibiles in rerum universitate*," is the poet's motto, and with a great splendour and force of imagination he enforces his text. "There was a ship," quoth he—and the weird vessel glides before the unwilling listener's eyes, so that he can see nothing else. It comes between him and the feast, between him and those figures of his friends which flit like ghosts out of every door. Which is the real, and which the vision? The mind grows giddy, and ceases to be able to judge; and while everything tangible dis-

appears, the unseen sweeps triumphantly in and holds possession, more real, more true, more unquestionable, than anything that eye can see.

This was what Coleridge meant when, seated on the breezy hillside with shadow and sunshine pursuing each other over the broad country at his feet, he took in hand to add to the common volume a poem which should deal with the supernatural and invisible, "so as to transfer from our outward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of the imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith." We might even find a further symbolism in the scene, within which this tale of mystery and fate came into being, and the circumstances which have framed, in a lovely picture of greenness and summer beauty, indulgent skies and youthful happiness, one of the gravest, profoundest, and most lofty utterances of poetry—a song which was "chanted with happy heart," with pleasant breaks of laughter and eager discussion, with glad gazings upon sun and shadow, with many a playful interruption and criticism—out of the heart of as sad a life as ever enacted itself in tragic pain and darkness before the eyes of men.

Nor was the story of the Mariner itself unworthy of its aim, or of the wonderful wealth of poetic resource poured forth upon it. When the struggle between the actual and the invisible is over, and the Mariner is triumphant, what a stillness as of the great deep falls upon the strain! The sun comes

up out of the sea, and goes down into it—grand image of the loneliness, the isolation from all other created things, of that speck upon the boundless noiseless waters. Throughout the poem this sentiment of isolation is preserved with a magical and most impressive reality; all the action is absolutely shut up within the doomed ship. The storm, and the mist, and the snow, the flitting vision of the albatross, the spectre vessel against the sunset, the voices of the spirits, all derive their importance from that one centre of human life, driven before the tyrannous wind or held at the pleasure of the still more terrible calm, yet the only thing that gives meaning to either. The one man who is the chronicler of all, and to whose fate everything refers, is never withdrawn from our attention for a moment. He is, as it were, the epitome of humankind, the emblem of the sinner and sufferer, shut up within those rotting bulwarks, beneath those sails so thin and sere. The awful trance of silence in which his being is involved,—a silence of awe and pain, yet of a dumb enduring unconquerable force,—descends upon us and takes possession of our spirits also; no loud bassoon, no festal procession, can break the charm of that intense yet passive consciousness. We grow silent with him "with throat unslaked, with black lips baked," in a sympathy which is the very climax of poetic pain. And then what touches of tenderness are those that surprise us in this numbness and trance of awful solitude—

"O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love rushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware"—

or this other which comes after the horror of the reanimated bodies, the ghastly crew of the dead-alive:—

"For when it dawned, they dropped their arms,
And clustered round the mast;
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,
And from their bodies passed.
Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the Sun;
Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mixed, now one by one.
Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the sky-lark sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning!
And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song,
Which makes the heavens be mute."

When the tale has reached its height of mystery and emotion, a change ensues; gradually the greater spell is removed, the spirits depart, the strain softens —with a weird yet gentle progress the ship comes "slowly and smoothly," without a breeze, back to the known and visible. As the voyage approaches its conclusion, ordinary instrumentalities appear once

more. There is first the rising of the soft familiar wind, "like a meadow gale in spring," then the blessed vision of the lighthouse-top, the hill, the kirk, all those well-known realities which gradually relieve the absorbed excitement of the listener, and favour his slow return to ordinary daylight. And then comes the ineffable half-childish, half-divine simplicity of those soft moralisings at the end, so strangely different from the tenor of the tale, so wonderfully perfecting its visionary strain. After all, the poet seems to say, after this weird excursion into the very deepest, awful heart of the seas and mysteries, here is your child's moral, a tender little half trivial sentiment, yet profound as the blue depths of heaven :—

> "He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all."

This unexpected gentle conclusion brings our feet back to the common soil with a bewildered sweetness of relief and soft quiet after the prodigious strain of mental excitement which is like nothing else we can remember in poetry. The effect is one rarely produced, and which few poets have the strength and daring to accomplish, sinking from the highest notes of spiritual music to the absolute simplicity of exhausted nature. Thus we are set down on the soft grass, in a tender bewilderment, out of the clouds. The visionary voyage is over, we are back again on the mortal soil from which we started; but never more, never again, can the visible and invisible bear

to us the same meaning. For once in our lives, if never before, we have passed the borders of the unseen.

The same period which produced the "Ancient Mariner" produced also "Christabel," as much of it as was ever written. It is said that Coleridge had planned the second part of this poem, and meant to finish it, but it is well that his wayward indolence came in, backed for once by the voices of judicious friends. Charles Lamb was one of those who said the fragment should never be completed, and that is something the more which we owe our beloved Elia. This further investigation into the unknown was not published for years after, but it was read in the brotherhood, and known, from this happy and fertile period. It is a more distinct revelation than the other. The first was, so to speak, introductory, an uplifting of the veil, the disclosure of a vast unseen world full of struggles and mysteries. The second is the distinct identification of a mystery of evil, an unseen harm and bane, working secretly in the dark places of the earth against white innocence, purity, and truth, and carrying on, with a new dread and awe, the continual conflict between good and evil. The poet does not stop to explain to us how this can be. Philosopher as he is to the depth of his soul, he is yet so much the more poet as to see that any theory of spiritual hate against the happiness of earth would confuse the unity of his strain, and probably transfer our interest, as it has done in the "Paradise Lost," to the despairing spirit whose envy and enmity arise out

of that hopeless majesty of wretchedness, great enough to be sublime, which devours his own soul. But Coleridge gives no reason for the hideous and terrible persecution of which his lovely maiden, "Christabel," symbolical even in name, is the object. The poem is a romance of Christianity—a legend of the saints. For no fault of hers, but rather for her virtues, are the powers of evil raised against her : and one of the most subtle and wonderful touches in the poem is that which makes us sensible of the ignorance of her innocence, her want of any knowledge or experience which can make her aware what the evil is, and how she is to deal with it. The witch Geraldine has all the foul wisdom of her wickedness to help her sorceries, her supernatural knowledge, her spells and cunning. But "Christabel" has nothing save her purity, and stands defenceless as a lamb, not even knowing what the danger is, exposed at every point in her simplicity, and paralysed, not instructed, by the first gleam of bewildering enlightenment. Never was there a higher or more beautiful conception. It is finer in its indefiniteness than the contrast of Una and Duessa, the pure and impure, the false and true, of a more elaborate allegory. Spencer, who lived in a more downright age, keeps himself within a narrower circle, and is compelled by his story to acts and deeds : but his very distinctness limits his power. The sorceress or disguised demon of Coleridge does not attempt to ruin her victim in any such uncompromising way. What she does is to throw boundless confusion into the gentle soul, to fill its limpid depths with fear and

horror and distrust of all fair appearances, and even of itself—a still more appalling doubt: to undermine the sacred foundations of that love and honour in which Christabel's very name is enshrined, and to establish herself, a subtle enemy, an antagonistic power, at the pure creature's side, turning her existence into chaos. Una is a foully slandered and innocent maiden, but Christabel is a martyr soul, suffering for her race, without knowing it, struggling in a dumb consternation against the evil that holds her spellbound. And all the more pathetic, all the more enthralling, is the picture, because the Christ-maiden is entirely human—too young, too childlike, even to understand the high mission which has fallen upon her. She knows nothing, neither her own position, a sight for angels to watch, nor all that depends upon her steadfast adherence to her white banner of religious faith and purity: but her enemy knows everything, and has an armoury of subtle spiritual weapons at her disposal: "Jesu Maria, shield her well!"

The contrast between the serene purity of the undisturbed soul and the confusion caused by her unconscious, unwilling contact with evil, is summed up in the following beautiful passage:—

"It was a lovely sight to see
The lady Christabel, when she
Was praying at the old oak tree.
    Amid the jagged shadows
    Of mossy leafless boughs,
    Kneeling in the moonlight,
    To make her gentle vows;

Her slender palms together prest,
Heaving sometimes on her breast;
Her face resigned to bliss or bale—
Her face, oh call it fair not pale,
And both blue eyes more bright than clear,
Each about to have a tear.

"With open eyes (ah woe is me!)
Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,
Fearfully dreaming, yet I wis,
Dreaming that alone, which is—
O sorrow and shame! Can this be she,
The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?
And lo! the worker of these harms,
That holds the maiden in her arms,
Seems to slumber still and mild,
As a mother with her child.

"A star hath set, a star hath risen,
O Geraldine! since arms of thine
Have been the lovely lady's prison.
O Geraldine! one hour was thine—
Thou'st had thy will! By tairn and rill,
The night-birds all that hour were still.
But now they are jubilant anew,
From cliff and tower, tu-whoo! tu-whoo!
Tu-whoo! tu-whoo! from wood and fell!
And see! the lady Christabel
Gathers herself from out her trance;
Her limbs relax, her countenance
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids
Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds—
Large tears that leave the lashes bright!
And oft the while she seems to smile
As infants at a sudden light!
Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,
Like a youthful hermitess,
Beauteous in a wilderness,

Who, praying always, prays in sleep.
And, if she move unquietly,
Perchance, 'tis but the blood so free,
Comes back and tingles in her feet.
No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.
What if her guardian spirit 'twere?
What if she knew her mother near?
But this she knows, in joys and woes,
That saints will aid if men will call:
For the blue sky bends over all!"

The first part, ending with the above lines, was written during this happy period at Nether Stowey; the next, not till several years later, when the poet had removed to the north country, and the brotherhood had begun to be known as the "Lake Poets." But it was not published until long after, in 1816, when the public, who had allowed the "Ancient Mariner" to slip into existence with very little notice, gave to this wonderful fragment such a reception as few poems have had. There was no doubt nor hesitation about it. Cottle tells us that Wordsworth attributed the failure of the "Lyrical Ballads" to the appearance in it of the "Ancient Mariner," which nobody understood; but it continued to hold its place in the next edition, which appeared in 1800, with a preface in which Wordsworth set forth his theories of poetry, and in two other successive editions. The fine poem called "Love," one of those which we place most willingly by the side of the "Mariner" and "Christabel," was also included in the second edition.

Notwithstanding the unsuccess of this volume, the universal ridicule with which it was received, and

the very inadequate idea of Wordsworth's genius given by it, there was, after its publication, very little real question about the rank of these two brother poets. How this should have come about it is difficult to say. It happens sometimes that under the great outcry of indignation or dislike, raised by a certain work or act, there is a subtle indescribable deposit left by its mere contact with the mind of the reader, which is the foundation of the fullest and truest fame. No better example could be than this first work of the new brotherhood. The effect was unequal, but that does not diminish its singularity: though we think Coleridge was far better represented in it than Wordsworth, yet the publication had no such effect upon the reputation of the author of the "Ancient Mariner" as upon that of his coadjutor. Wordsworth was the special object of assault on all hands, but his poetical fortune was made. When the book was republished, the copyright of which had been given back to him as worthless, it was no longer an unbroken phalanx of angry or indignant critics which he found before him. Here and there a young outlooker on some watch-tower had seen the light on the skies, and recognised whence it came. He got nothing but abuse for his first publication, but yet, in some strange way, it became his stepping-stone to fame.

The second edition contained two series of poems, which every lover of Wordsworth turns to instinctively, as perhaps the most exquisite of his minor productions. These are the poems which reveal "Lucy"—she of

whom nature vowed to make "a lady of her own"—she, who "dwelt among the untrodden ways, beside the springs of Dove," the most refined, yet most simple of all the half-revealed dreams of poetry. Five little poems are all we have of her. If she were a real being, or only an imagination, no one can tell; but the little casket of gems, in which her gentle name is enshrined, is pure and divine as the stars themselves, though the poems are artless as so many wild flowers. Here, indeed, the poet has arrived at his aim of producing the very highest effect by the simplest means—yet not as he meant to do it: for his subject is no grotesque embodiment of lowly love, but a creature belonging to the order of the Juliets and Desdemonas, the lawful ladies of our fancy. The consecration and the pathos of her story, which is no story, is almost more sacred, indeed, than that of these queens of the imagination—for it is wrapped round about in a pensive, yet penetrating sadness, devoid either of hope or passion. She is dead before we so much as hear of her. When her lover, riding towards her cottage, sees the waning moon go down, and gloom come over that humble roof, his heart is struck with an ominous foreboding—

> "What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
> Into a lover's head!—
> 'O mercy!' to myself I cried,
> 'If Lucy should be dead!'"

Another step, another little broken outburst of simplest song, and we know that the foreboding has come true—

"She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!"

Never were words more simple, more everyday: and yet it is hard to read them without tears, impossible if the reader's life has ever held a Lucy of its own. Without passion, with no outcry even, more strong than this sense of want, it is heartrending in its quiet despair. The conclusion of all, which touches even patriotism to a deeper tone, we may quote entire. There is the very soul of chastened sorrow and profoundest melancholy faithfulness in every word—

"I travelled among unknown men,
In lands beyond the sea;
Nor, England! did I know till then
What love I bore to thee.

"'Tis past, that melancholy dream!
Nor will I quit thy shore
A second time; for still I seem
To love thee more and more.

"Among thy mountains did I feel
The joy of my desire;
And she I cherished turned her wheel
Beside an English fire.

"Thy mornings showed, thy nights concealed
The bowers where Lucy played;
And thine too, is the last green field
That Lucy's eyes surveyed."

This wonderful little record of a love and grief unknown, was made in Germany, where the poet had

spent a dreary winter. To ourselves it is impossible to imagine that these poems had not a reference to some real history of the heart; but there is no indication of any such thing in Wordsworth's life. The exquisite pathos and power with which the story is conveyed to us was perhaps purposely marred by the poet himself, who separated the verses, according to some solemn fantasy of his own, into different classifications. We are glad to see that Mr. Matthew Arnold, in his recent selection from Wordsworth, has put them together, and permitted them at last to tell their own tale.

And by the side of "Lucy" unknown, we place another figure of a different kind, no more than an old schoolmaster—the Matthew, whose name on a village tablet calls forth the poet's tender exclamation—

> "—Thou soul of God's best earthly mould!
> Thou happy Soul! and can it be
> That these two words of glittering gold
> Are all that must remain of thee?"

The "Two April Mornings," and "The Fountain" contain this humble wayfarer as in some magic globe of crystal. They are so beautiful that the mere thought of them is like a strain of music. If Wordsworth had no more than these to build his fame upon, he would yet be sure of immortality. The suggestion of a noble human creature, "a man of mirth," one whose very tears "were tears of light, the dew of gladness," yet by whom the mood of "still and serious thought" was "felt with spirit so profound," is such as, perhaps, no one else, in so brief a space, and with

so little aid of circumstance, could have given. It is impossible to refrain from setting this gem of purest ray serene in the humble framework of this page. Not only literature, but life is the better for anything so exquisite—

"We walked along, while bright and red
 Uprose the morning sun;
And Matthew stopped, he looked and said,
 'The will of God be done!'

"A village Schoolmaster was he,
 With hair of glittering gray;
As blithe a man as you could see
 On a spring holiday.

"And on that morning, through the grass
 And by the steaming rills,
We travelled merrily, to pass
 A day among the hills.

"'Our work,' said I, 'was well begun;
 Then, from thy breast what thought,
Beneath so beautiful a sun,
 So sad a sigh has brought?'

"A second time did Matthew stop;
 And fixing still his eye
Upon the eastern mountain-top,
 To me he made reply:

"'Yon cloud with that long purple cleft
 Brings fresh into my mind
A day like this which I have left
 Full thirty years behind.

"'And just above yon slope of corn
 Such colours, and no other,
Where in the sky, that April morn,
 Of this the very brother.

" 'With rod and line I sued the sport
  Which that sweet season gave,
And, coming to the church, stopped short
  Beside my daughter's grave.

" 'Nine summers had she scarcely seen,
  The pride of all the vale ;
And then she sang ;—she would have been
  A very nightingale.

" 'Six feet in earth my Emma lay ;
  And yet I loved her more,
For so it seemed, than till that day
  I e'er had loved before.

" 'And, turning from her grave, I met,
  Beside the churchyard yew,
A blooming girl, whose hair was wet
  With points of morning dew.

" 'A basket on her head she bare ;
  Her brow was smooth and white :
To see a child so very fair,
  It was a pure delight !

" 'No fountain from its rocky cave
  E'er tripped with foot so free ;
She seemed as happy as a wave
  That dances on the sea.

" 'There came from me a sigh of pain
  Which I could ill confine ;
I looked at her, and looked again :
  —And did not wish her mine.'

" Matthew is in his grave, yet now,
  Methinks, I see him stand,
As at that moment, with a bough
  Of wilding in his hand."

Wordsworth has for the present, perhaps, passed the height of his fame. He is less universally appreciated, less beloved, than he was twenty years ago. The failure can only be temporary, but it is grief to those to whom he stands like his own mountains, a glory and power, to catch the echo of a jibe from unlikely quarters nowadays, repeating the jibes with which the eighteenth century, while it lay a-dying, feebly mocked at the innovation. But even that old century, on the verge of the grave, and with the mock on its bloodless lips, began to feel before it died that the new poet was too many for it, with all its powers of ridicule, and with all the opportunities for their exercise which he gave so boldly. The "Lyrical Ballads," at which every toothless critic sneered, and upon which the new gladiators of literature all fleshed their swords, was nevertheless, as he intended, the sure foundation of the poet's fame. He insisted, notwithstanding all the jests, that this and no other should be the first stone, and by sheer strength of genius and strength of will, succeeded, unlikely though it seemed.

Such were the two young poets who, after all preludes and symphonies were completed, opened a new and noble chapter, a great era, of poetry in England. Wordsworth brought to the sweet, and fair, and real English landscape, rediscovered with all its genial breezes and wholesome freshness by Cowper, his own deeply reasoning spirit, full of a lofty perception of the mysteries, and sorrows, and doubts, of nature, and a high sympathetic philosophical faculty for the solution of these doubts and mysteries. In-

stead of the stale moralities and reflections of which the world had grown so weary, he brought back to human nature that high vindication of the ways of God to man which Milton and his angels had held in Eden, and taking—what mattered the outside ?—a poet or a peasant indifferently, expounded the agency of human sorrows in the economy of life, and put forth his hand to grasp "the far-off interest of tears."—Coleridge, on the other hand, opened up all that mystic world of suggestion in which the human spirit lives conscious but bewildered, "the world not realised," the wonderful unknown to which no soul is a stranger, which no man has ever interpreted, but which, breathing mysteriously upon us in tremors of the blood and thrills of spiritual curiosity, attracts more or less every conscious soul. The mystic wanderer who has lived among the dead, and carries about the world the burden of his strange punishment: the undisclosed secret of that darkness out of which the lady who is "beautiful exceedingly," the "angel beautiful and bright," who is nevertheless a fiend, glides suddenly when the victim thinks no evil: and all the powers of the heights and the depths thus came back upon the world which had forgotten any spiritual creatures more entrancing or mysterious than the Nymphs and Muses, and those little vulgar spirits that managed Belinda's petticoat. New voices were yet to rise, and new lights to appear, in the firmament before the epoch was accomplished, but it had come to its full and splendid beginning, with all its paths made straight and all its foundations

laid, when Wordsworth and Coleridge published the "Lyrical Ballads," and came forth from their solitudes upon the world.

In poetry Coleridge made no advance upon the work of those early days. His philosophy did not affect the world as his poetry did, notwithstanding the glamour of impression rather than influence which it produced afterwards, or which his personal presence and discourse produced, when he was no longer young, upon those who were. It will, however, demand notice elsewhere. With Wordsworth the result of years was very different. When he settled in his native north country at Grasmere, and finally at Rydal, where he lived the greater part of his life, and died an old man, it was with the settled intention of devoting himself and all his powers to poetry, and the records of the earlier portion of this retired life are entirely poetical. His sister was still his sole and constant companion, and her diary, full of many gleams of poetic description and insight, is yet an almost matter-of-fact account of incidents which her keen eyes and ready perception noted, or which friends related to the steady and diligent workman, whose whole soul was bent upon his noble trade, and who immediately made use of the material, and reproduced it in verse. They met upon the road "an old man bent nearly double," whose trade it was to gather leeches—and straightway "William wrote the 'Leech-Gatherer,'" one of the noblest of his lesser poems; or Dorothy encountered a party of wandering beggars—parents and children;

or "we saw a few daffodils close to the waterside." Nothing was neglected between them; no unusual effect either of mind or matter, no incident of life, but found a place. These swallow flights of song, however, were not enough to satisfy the conscientious mind of the man who had determined not only to be a poet, but a great one, and who felt the pressure of his mission upon him. Wordsworth was a lover of system and theory. The wild simplicities of the Lyrical Ballads, as we have seen, were all severely resolved upon, and he was now not less, but more, bent upon impressing his poetical creed upon the world. He began, therefore, as soon as he had settled himself in the north, to look about him for a subject great enough for his handling, and very soon came to the decision, with something of the large and lofty egotism which was one of the inspirations of his life, that nothing more profoundly interesting than the "history of his own mind" could be given to the world. He describes his intention, and all the farspreading results that were to follow, with a sort of simple grandiloquence, in his preface to the "Excursion," published in 1814.

"When the Author retired to his native mountains with the hope of being able to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them. That Work, addressed to a dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, and to whom the Author's Intellect

is deeply indebted, . . . and the result of the investigation which gave rise to it was a determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society, and to be entitled the 'Recluse'; as having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement. The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two Works have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the ante-chapel has to the body of a Gothic church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add that his minor Pieces, . . . when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work, as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses ordinarily included in those edifices."

The artificial solemnity of this scheme, given forth with a sublime unconsciousness of all possibilities of derision, is not, perhaps, more remarkable than the arrogant humility of the theories with which the Lyrical Ballads were issued to the world. Never was there a more curious demonstration of the foolishness of wisdom. He who proclaimed himself as the emancipator of the poetic art would have fitted her into the most rigid machinery if he could have had his will, and the elaborate system in which every part was adapted to the other, and all together were to form a temple of glory great as Solomon's own, and worthy to be the centre of earth, was almost more dear to him than the poetry itself, though that was the breath of his nostrils. But nature which loves no such elaboration, and wayward genius which

scorns machinery, and human liking which will none of it, had the better of Wordsworth. He had vanquished the age with his Lyrical Ballads, returning again and again to the charge with the selfsame weapon, till his despised arms had won the battle; but not even his obstinate valour and steady pertinacity could achieve this second triumph. Poetry blew away his systems like the mere foam of fancy they were. No one, even among his worshippers, has thought of his work as of a "Gothic church." Most people whose opinion is worth having—backed by that general multitude which pretends to little discrimination, yet has a commanding instinct superior to criticism—would rather lose both "Excursion" and "Prelude," than consent to part with the "Leech-Gatherer," or that great "Ode" which also belongs to these peaceful prefatory years. Even Wordsworth's enormous force of will, united to his genius, could not succeed in making the history of a poet's mind a subject of absorbing interest to the world. But he himself must have so far felt this that he never carried out his majestic intention. The "Prelude" was indeed finished, but it was not given to the world till after Wordsworth's death, when it was received with the reverential respect due to a posthumous work from such a hand, but not with any enthusiasm of appreciation. The friend to whom it was addressed was Coleridge, who speaks of it with rapturous admiration, declaring that this dedication was the only thing in the world which could give him an hour's vanity; and perhaps the warmest, certainly the most

touching, link of human interest which we have with the poem is the effect it produced upon him when, on his return from Malta in 1806, the completed manuscript was read to him by his friend. By that time he had entered upon the downward part of his career. Bad health, combined, no doubt, with the restlessness of a mind unsatisfied, and a conscience already sick and burdened with weakness it could not overcome, had sent him away wandering in search of health and peace two years before. At Malta he had fallen fortuitously into public employment, which gave some meaning to his detention, but he was uneasy and restless under these bonds as under all other. When he arrived in England, after this long absence, his first visit was to the Wordsworths at Coleorton, the house of Sir George Beaumont; and here it was that this poetical autobiography, full of so many noble passages, and at all points overflowing with interest to Wordsworth's contemporary and brother-in-arms, was read to him. Coleridge was greatly moved. He felt the contrast to his very heart: his friend had gone steadily and solemnly on in his career, and seemed now sure of that starry crown of immortality which, a little while before, had appeared more near Coleridge's head than his; while he had dropped away into ways which were not ways of blessedness, into a melancholy oblivion of his own highest aims and powers. It is not difficult to imagine what must have been the thoughts of the worn and weary traveller, conscious of many a slip and backsliding. How different the

situation then from their conjunction at the time of which the poem had just reminded him, when, from "Quantock's airy ridge" the entire world of life and poetry lay at the feet of the two brethren in genius. In the stillness of the summer night, the unfortunate, the unsuccessful, the erring and suffering wanderer, addressed his friend in lines which betray the swelling of a full heart. "An Orphic song indeed," he cries—

> "A song divine, of high and passionate thoughts
> To their own music chanted!"

He gazes upon the writer with a new-born awe, viewing him "in the choir of ever-enduring men," one of those "truly great" who—

> "Have all one age, and from one visible space
> Shed influence!"

But he himself, the poet's peer and comrade, how strangely, how sadly different, how deeply departed from their common aims!

> "Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn,
> The pulses of my being beat anew:
> And even as life returns upon the drowned
> Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains,
> Keen pangs of love, awakening as a babe,
> Turbulent with an outcry in the heart;
> And fears self-willed that shunned the eye of hope,
> And hope that scarce would know itself from fear;
> Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain,
> And genius given and knowledge won in vain;
> And all which I had culled in woodwalks wild,
> And all which patient toil had reared, and all,
> Commune with thee had opened out—but flowers
> Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my bier,
> In the same coffin, for the self same grave!"

The growth of a poet's mind, developing itself serene and lofty, amid all the still and sublime influences of virtue and domestic calm, affords room for many an elevated thought: but as long as humanity is as now, this other figure coming in, no conqueror but sadly worsted in the life-battle, his bosom strained with a sob of self-compassion, yet generous voice of enthusiasm, proclaiming the triumph of the victor, will gain from us a very different regard. Wordsworth in his self-determined greatness has our respect and admiration, but it is with that anguish of sympathy which stirs the very depths of our being, that we turn to the other, with his weird and wonderful insight into the mysteries of creation, and his helpless incapacity to hold his own against the vulgarest forces of evil. The contrast is heart-rending yet ever-recurring. And it is one of the most affecting of compensations, that the soul which fails in the fight should so often possess that magnanimity and generous power of appreciation which Coleridge thus manifested. We cannot but doubt whether Wordsworth, the pure and strong, had he failed like his brother, could have borne the comparison with anything like the same noble candour and humility.

The "Prelude," perhaps, was too long delayed to have its due effect upon the public mind. In 1850, which was the date of its publication, the French Revolution, and all the convulsions which attended it, were so far away, and the feelings of hope, of wonder, of dismay, with which its progress was watched, had by

that time fallen too entirely into the calm of historical contemplation to stir the lively sympathy of the reader : but the value of the poem as a picture of the mental history of the period can scarcely be over-estimated. The philosophical yet sympathetic spectator, curious, anxious, and full of the deepest interest, watching the historic scroll roll out before him with all a contemporary's certainty of understanding, yet bewildered half knowledge of those hieroglyphics which only Time intreprets fully—elucidates, if not the stirring story of the time, yet his own generation, with all its hopes and aspirations and disappointments, better than any other historian has done. It is not, however, to this part of the record that the poetical reader will turn, but to the earlier scenes, the poet's childhood among his "native mountains," his schoolboy feats and adventures—still Esthwaite, in the midst of its valley, "the moon in splendour couched among the leaves of a tall ash that near our cottage stood," and these questionings of nature and silence which arose in the heart of the growing boy. This schoolboy story is full of the freshness of the mountains, and the thrill of simple life and nature. Perhaps a picture more vivid and real, yet more finely imaginative, was never drawn than that of the frozen lake and the band of boyish skaters careless of the summons to home and the fireside which "the cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom."

> . . "not a voice was idle: with the din
> Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;
> The leafless trees and every icy crag

Tinkled like iron; while far distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,
Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.
Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay,—or sportively
Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,
To cut across the reflex of a star
That fled, and, flying still before me, gleamed
Upon the glassy plain; and oftentimes,
When we had given our bodies to the wind,
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion, then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round!
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep."

It would be impossible to find a description more true to fact, yet more instinct with the wonder and the mystery of existence and this "world not realised," which is its scene.

The "Excursion," which is the only part of the proposed great poem of the "Recluse" which got into being, was published in 1814, while the controversies, excited by the "Lyrical Ballads," were still in force. And though the poet had by that time a devoted band of disciples, and had so far conquered public attention that nothing could come from his hand which the critics dared venture to neglect, yet the

treatment of this long poem was not much more genial than that with which its predecessors had been entertained. Jeffrey, to his own confusion, hailed it, as everybody knows, with that "This will never do," which has served the world for an example of light-hearted audacity ever since. We are doubtful, however, whether, had it been published now, even the more wary critics of our own days, warned by such examples, might not have given a very similar verdict. No poem so long, so monotonous, and at the same time so unequal, was ever popular. That there are many passages in it of the noblest poetry does not in any way affect this fact; and both in its nobleness and in its heaviness, the atmosphere was too elevated for common man. Without the relief of story, or of any variety of character, with nothing but the highest rarefied air of the mountains about the three or four austere philosophical figures reasoning among themselves of the ways of God to man, nothing was left to attract the lighter part of nature, or to beguile the careless reader into the high fare thus set before him. We doubt if the lowliness of the chief character, the still half-ostentatious selection of the trade of pedlar to distinguish him, was half the drawback it was supposed to be; but the unbroken gravity of the strain, its lofty dialogue almost entirely occupied with the philosophy of sorrow,—that lofty and abstruse argument by which the poet and the creatures of his fancy endeavour to prove the advantages to humanity of individual grief and misfortune,—touched only here and there a note to which the

heart could respond. The first book contains a picture of extraordinary pathos and power, from which it results that there are many who know the story of Margaret, just as there are many who are acquainted with the episode of Paolo and Francesca in the *Inferno*, without venturing farther in a way too high for them. This story has furnished English poetry with one of the most touching pictures of the anguish of suspense and the long heart-breaking vigil of vain expectation, to be found in any language. The wistful, patient woman sitting at her cottage door, with her long scrutinising gaze directed along the vacant road, her eyes "busy in the distance, shaping things that make her heart beat quick," her habitual pause in her work to give another and another glance to that vacancy out of which the beloved, long-looked-for wanderer might at any moment come,—her infant that "from its mother caught the trick of grief and sighed among its playthings,"—her wide wanderings afield when her heart grew too sick to rest, and the gradual desperate yielding of heart and hope, of comfort and all its outside semblances—are placed before us with a reality of sadness which is heartrending. This figure appears in the foreground of the picture with a humble majesty of woe which recalls the cry of another sufferer—

> "Here I and Sorrow sit;
> This is my throne, let kings come bow to it."

There is no other figure in the poem so real or so fine. The Priest and the Pedlar, who join in the excursion of the poet by the village churchyard and among

the surrounding hills, are but so many Wordsworths taking up the different tones of his argument—the Solitary a feebler objector, equally philosophical, whose bitterness is made to be overcome. How evil itself can be turned to good, how the great patience of suffering ennobles the earth and the race, and how all that is painful passes away, leaving an immortal tranquillity and confidence as the supreme mood of nature, is the argument of the whole. It is a very lofty argument, worth a poet's while; but it is hard to seize, and needs a mind of kindred peacefulness and faith. When the poet has heard Margaret's melancholy story his heart goes out towards her in all the tenderness of sympathy. "It seemed," he says,

> "To comfort me, while with a brother's love
> I blessed her in the impotence of grief."

He feels himself solaced and strengthened by this flood of natural feeling. The tale of grief impresses and solemnises his own soul.

> "Then towards the cottage I returned; and traced
> Fondly, though with an interest more mild,
> That secret spirit of humanity
> Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies
> Of nature, 'mid her plants, and weeds, and flowers,
> And silent overgrowings, still survived.
> The old Man, noting this, resumed, and said,
> 'My Friend! enough to sorrow you have given,
> The purposes of wisdom ask no more:
>
> . . . . .
>
> She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.
> I well remember that those very plumes,
> Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,
> By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,

As once I passed into my heart conveyed
So still an image of tranquillity,
So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
That what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
That passing shows of Being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream, that could maintain,
Nowhere, dominion o'er the enlightened spirit
Whose meditative sympathies repose
Upon the breast of Faith. I turned away,
And walked along my road in happiness.'"

In all his mature work this is always the lesson which Wordsworth labours to enforce. Perhaps the early shock given to his mind by the failure of the visionary hopes, of which France was the centre, first turned his deeply searching and patient intelligence to draw some sort of goodness, if he could, out of things evil—and as his mind ripened and occupied itself more and more with the great questions of human life, the so frequent failure of all hopes, the incessant disappointments and miseries of men, this was the consolation which he gathered to himself: that sorrow was temporary but peace eternal, and that Nature's continual work is to bind up wounds and cover over graves. This constant process of renovation and the perpetual survival of the general calm, whatsoever may be the adversities of the individual, which appals the minds of some observers, and makes Nature, in their eyes, a cruel automaton altogether indifferent to the fortunes of mankind, was to Wordsworth a sacred and hopeful patience, an assurance of that everlasting composure and satisfac-

tion that is in the bosom of God. It is easier, perhaps, to give to this doctrine a large adhesion, and to preach it to men, when the soul of the speaker dwells in peace as Wordsworth's did, and disappointment and calamity do not come his way. But it is a noble burden of prophecy; and nowhere could it have had a fitter atmosphere than in that presence of the hills which pervades this great poem. The mountains are all about us, as we read, raising their great shadows against the sky, opening out into blue distance, with many a misty peak, and half-seen valley, or closing in the scene with serried rank of cliff on cliff, and rock piled above rock—

> "The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills,"

an air chill and pure; a sweep of uncontaminated wind, the hush of half-heard streams, and inarticulate movement spread all about. This sentiment of the mountains is in itself a poem, and the "Excursion" is instinct with it. The long reasonings, the over-serious argument, may weary the reader, but even the most careless will find that he has been swept away into a land of mists and mountains, amid influences of the clouds and winds, and lyric out-bursts of sunshine and light, such as come nowhere else. It is more than descriptive poetry. The poet's intense realisation of those beloved landscapes carries us with him into the very bosom of his hills.

But of all the poems to which this wonderful season of fruitfulness gave birth, perhaps the one which we would least willingly let die is the "Ode"—

to which we hardly require to add its long sounding descriptive title, "On the Intimations of Immortality." Most of the other odes in the English language are prized for their fidelity to the rules of an exotic production, but no one has any leisure to think of Strophe or Antistrophe, when this divinest utterance of modern poetry carries him away on its sea of silver melody and wondrous thought. The child, the new-born creature, unfamiliar with earth, "trailing clouds of glory" from the unknown whence he came, and feeling all about him a world not realised, the dangerous deadly sphere in which he is to play out the part which, with a thousand joyous mockeries and gleams of bewildering insight, he rehearses unawares—stands out before us, the tenderest unconscious hero of humankind. Never was there so wonderful a picture drawn all in lines of light: and never were thoughts so profound revealed in a more limpid strain of perfect poetry. If it may be permitted to bring in a personal recollection, the writer can scarcely refrain from recalling the silent uncommunicated rapture with which this wonderful poem swept into her mind in the early years, when feeling is more near the infinite than maturity can realise. Books were not to be had in those days at every corner, and she still retains, with a half-amused, half-regretful tenderness, a little sheaf of yellow leaflets, how carefully written out! containing the "Ode" which was a revelation of inconceivable beauty and emotion.

"The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed

For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:—
Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!
Hence in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

Wordsworth lived a gentle, retired, and dignified life among his "native mountains" from this time forward. He was what so few poets are—or perhaps

it is more just to say were—prosperous and well off during all the rest of his life; his own steadfast and determined nature forcing, one might almost think, the gifts of the external world, as well as that full acknowledgment of his genius which his age was at first so unwilling to give. The reader who loves Wordsworth will, in most cases, prefer not to read his own commentaries upon himself, a subject upon which he was too solemnly eloquent; and we have already endeavoured to point out in what way the poetical theories with which he began his life were strained and unnatural. He kept to them in so far as to make the hero of his longest poem a Pedlar; but the language of the "Excursion" is as far from the bald simplicity which he recommended at the outset, as it is possible to imagine; and that poem, as well as the "Prelude," is markedly addressed, not to the "huts where poor men lie," but to a specially elect and chosen audience—the few who are able to appreciate efforts so continuous and lofty.

We refrain from any criticism of the poems on classical subjects which, by some critics, are invested, it seems to us, with an entirely undue importance, principally because they *are* upon classical subjects—those themes which have been proclaimed so well and so much by their own poets as to leave little inducement, we think, for their re-treatment by the sons of an age so remote and so different. The "Laodameia," however beautiful, shows none of the characteristic qualities of Wordsworth, and it is Wordsworth, and not an abstract poet, whom we are here to deal with. Neither

shall we attempt to wade through the waste of sonnets in which, with painfully systematic zeal, he has expressed a multitude of sentiments, not very original, upon various subjects. Some dozen of these are worthy of the highest rank, and will recur at once to the recollection of the reader; the rest we would willingly dispense with altogether. But our venerated poet was no critic. He had a certain religious regard for his work, whatever it was, and sometimes liked the worst best, with a simplicity of human foolishness which might endear his wisdom to us, if it were not uncomfortably mixed with that solemn egotism which was his greatest defect.

Wordsworth lived to be acknowledged the greatest living name in literature, and at the end of his life he received that graceful tribute of public honour, the laureateship, which before then had been soiled by much ignoble use, but which Southey had gathered out of the mud, and which has been actually as well as formally, the meed of the greatest since then. He lived a prosperous, and serene, and untroubled life until the end, when natural sorrows clouded over "the eye which had kept watch o'er man's mortality." When it came to be his turn to see his best-beloved go to the grave before him, the poet bore his sorrows with a noble and touching patience. He died in April 1850, the last of the great brotherhood—at once of his own companions and of the younger band who, among them, had raised the end of one century and the beginning of the next, into a great poetic age—one of the greatest in English history; he survived all, as

he was in many respects the greatest and most influential of all—the strongest nature and the most steadfast soul.

Of Coleridge we can make no such record. While Wordsworth was devoting himself to his great art, in determined withdrawal from everything that he thought likely to debase or distract his mind, Coleridge was wandering uneasily from place to place, seldom appearing in the spot which he had chosen as his home. His health was the reason commonly alleged, and it is added by some that the constant society of so well-regulated and orderly a companion as Southey, was more than this much-proposing and little-accomplishing soul could bear. But at least he was constantly absent: for two years in Malta, as has been seen; at other times in different parts of England; sometimes in London, fitfully engaging in newspaper work; neither well nor happy at any time; falling daily more and more under the sway of a deadly habit; losing hope, and courage, and self-respect; a sort of discrowned king, never without the signs of inalienable royalty, but without a subject, even in himself; with all his learning wasted, and all his wonderful faculties running to seed. In 1809 we find him at Grasmere, under the inspiring influence of Wordsworth, and there he published, through the hands of a local bookseller, *The Friend*, a little weekly periodical, in which his own fine and abstruse thinkings, and the contributions of his brethren and immediate disciples in literature, made up a publication as entirely caviare to the general as ever issued

from the press. It lived for some months, appearing at irregular intervals, and was, so far as popularity went, an entire failure, which, indeed, might have been looked for. In 1810 he finally left the Lakes and his family, returning to them no more. It was with Mr. Basil Montague, the genial friend and helper of so many men of letters, whose house and heart were open to generations of writers, from Godwin down to Carlyle, and who was not always recompensed by the gratitude of his guests, that Coleridge went to London, and he lived for some time in the house of this kind friend and brother, whose society and care were, no doubt, supposed likely to be salutary to the unfortunate poet. For the next half-dozen years we can follow Coleridge but dimly through the shadows of his unhappy life. Now and then he reappeared in the daylight, notably in 1813, when his tragedy "Remorse" was produced at Drury Lane. It had been submitted to Sheridan many years before, but had been by him laughed out of hearing. It was to Lord Byron now that its reception was owing. He, then in the height of his early popularity, a young demigod, beloved alike of fashion and genius, was all-influential in the theatre, for which, after the failure of the competition (which produced the genial mockery of the "Rejected Addresses"), he had been requested to write an opening Ode—and was generally in the ascendant. He had libelled Coleridge in the "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," and was to do so again: but though he was so little qualified to judge the poet as to speak of the author of the "Ancient Mariner," as "to turgid ode

and tumid stanza dear," yet his deeds were better than his words, and it was his generous interposition which procured this drama a hearing. "The success was immediate and decisive, and the play had a run of twenty nights;" then, to all appearance, it dropped from the stage, and was heard of no more. It was published, however, shortly afterwards, and a large number sold at once. During this period, too, Coleridge reappeared as a lecturer discoursing upon poetry—upon Shakspeare, and Milton, and the earlier dramatists—lectures which were attended by some eager auditors, intent on seeing, almost more than hearing, the poet, one of whom was young Keats. Crabb Robinson's account of these lectures is, however, entirely in keeping with the melancholy circumstances and mind of the poet. "I do hope he will have steadiness to go on with the lectures to the end. It would be so great a point gained if he could but pursue one object without interruption," a friend writes of him to this deeply concerned and interested spectator; and Robinson, in return, furnished a description of the curious irregularity and inequality of these performances. Of one, he says that Coleridge "surpassed himself in the art of talking in a very interesting way without speaking at all on the subject announced. According to advertisement, he was to lecture on 'Romeo and Juliet,' and Shakspeare's female characters. Instead of this, he began with a defence of school-flogging, in preference, at least, to Lancaster's mode of punishing, without pretending to find the least connection between that

topic and poetry. . . . On another occasion, however, he declaimed with great eloquence about love without wandering from his subject. . . . As evidence of splendid talent, original thought, and rare powers of expression and fancy, they are all his admirers can wish; but as a discharge of his undertaking, a fulfilment of his promise to the public, they give his friends great uneasiness." "He has about one hundred and fifty hearers on an average," says the same writer. Thus the light which was in him gleamed fitfully, showing chiefly its own eclipse. In 1814 he visited Bristol for the same purpose of delivering lectures, and there his unhappy condition aroused the pained and troubled comments of his faithful friend Cottle, he who had been the providence of his youth. It is very natural that Coleridge's family should have resented this good man's maunderings on so painful a subject: and yet it would have been a very unusual stretch of virtue had he refrained, and he had, he assures us, the injunction of Coleridge himself, always full of that facile but ineffectual penitence which rends the hearts of friends, always pious and desirous of affording help to his fellow-creatures, to justify the publication of the poet's own melancholy letter as a warning and an example to others. In 1816 this painful period of his life came to an end, and he was received into the house of Mr. Gillman at Highgate, who treated him at once as a medical attendant and devoted friend, and procured him some comfort and tranquillity in the later years of his life. His "Christabel" was published only at this period; but it had been so

well known in literary circles before,—so often read, recited, and quoted,—that its final introduction to the public seems but an insignificant incident in the story of this wonderful poem. It had instant and immense acceptance among all who loved poetry. The easy strain, the facile verse, which Scott had so brilliantly, yet so simply, introduced, and which almost every poet of the age had used more or less, came to its apotheosis in this mystic and lovely spiritual romance. The "consecration and the poet's dream;" the "light that never was on sea and land," had at last penetrated through and through this artless web of poetry and given it its highest development. During these latter years in the sheltered retreat at Highgate, where he was at least free from the storms and shames of an unhappy existence, Coleridge collected and published several volumes, and in 1828 an entire edition of his poetical works; but all his finest utterances belong to the period of his early intercourse with Wordsworth. "The Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and that exquisite poem called "Love," which of all the others is, perhaps, the one which his true disciples like the best, belong to these all-golden and hopeful morning hours. Had he never written a line in poetry after the beginning of the century, it would not have materially affected his fame. His "Biographia Literaria," and several of his philosophical works, belonged to the painful period, between 1810 and 1816, when his fortunes were at the lowest, and his life the saddest. These were published after he had reached the final haven of his declining days.

There is, however, no aspect of Coleridge's life so well known to the public as that of his later life at Highgate—we cannot call it his old age, for he died at sixty-two on the edge only of that period. There, in his seclusion, he drew all manner of intelligences towards him; enthusiastic young men went out to sit at his feet—Edward Irving, John Sterling—the former taking with him a certain young Scotsman in the rough husk of a genius still undeveloped, future preacher of Hero-worship, but in himself little addicted to that religion, and judging all things with a sort of relentless Gothic eyesight, intolerant of all that was unusual to him. But Carlyle's description of the poet-sage, if not reverential, is in all its circumstances more picturesque and vivid than any other we can supply to the reader. "Coleridge," he says, "sat on the brow of Highgate Hill in those years, looking down on London and its smoke-tumult like a sage escaped from the inanity of life's battle, attracting towards him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there." He of whom Southey first of all, and afterwards the Wordsworths, and such differing witnesses as gossipy Mr. Cottle in his Bristol shop, and young Hazlitt acute and bitter, had but one word to say in the days of his strength—that never man had produced such an impression of infinite faculty and many-sided soul—appeared under a different light to the natural scepticism, the half-defiant, all-inquiring gaze of the young and stubborn Scot. He continues:—

"He was thought to hold, he alone in England, the key of German and other Transcendentalisms; knew the sublime secret

of believing by the 'reason' what the 'understanding' had been obliged to fling out as incredible; and could still, after Hume and Voltaire had done their best and worst with him, profess himself an orthodox Christian, and say and print to the Church of England, with its singular old rubrics and surplices at Allhallowtide, *Esto Perpetua*. A sublime man; who alone in those dark days had saved his crown of spiritual manhood; escaping from the black materialisms and revolutionary deluges with 'God, Freedom, Immortality' still his: a king of men. The practical intellects of the world did not much heed him, or carelessly reckoned him a metaphysical dreamer; but to the rising spirits of the young generation he had this dusky sublime character, and sat there as a kind of Magus, girt in mystery and enigma: his Dodona oak-grove, Mr. Gillman's house at Highgate —whispering strange things, uncertain whether oracles or jargon. The Gillmans did not encourage much company or excitation of any sort round their sage; nevertheless, access to him, if a youth did reverently wish it, was not difficult. He would stroll about the pleasant garden with you, sit in the pleasant rooms of the place—perhaps take you to his own peculiar room high up, with a rearward view, which was the chief view of all. A really charming outlook in fine weather. Close at hand wide sweep of flowery leafy gardens, their few houses mostly hidden, the very chimney pots veiled under blossomy umbrage, flowed gloriously down hill, gloriously issuing in wide-tufted undulating plain-country rich in all charms of field and town. Waving blooming country of the brightest green, dotted all over with handsome villas, handsome groves, crossed by roads and human traffic here inaudible or heard only as a musical hum, and behind all, swam, under olive-tinted haze, the illimitable limitary ocean of London, with its domes and steeples definite in the sun, big Paul's and the many memories attached to it hanging high over all. Nowhere of its kind could you see a grander prospect on a bright summer day with the set of the air going southward—southward, and so draping with the city smoke not *you* but the city. Here for hours would Coleridge talk concerning all conceivable or inconceivable things;

and liked nothing better than to have an intelligent, or failing that, even a silent and patient human listener. He distinguished himself to all that ever heard him as the most surprising talker extant in this world—and to some small minority, by no means to all, as the most excellent. The good man, he was now getting old, towards sixty perhaps; and gave you the idea of a life that had been full of sufferings; a life heavy laden, half vanquished, still swimming painfully in seas of manifold physical and other bewilderment. Brow and head were round and of massive weight, but the face was flabby and irresolute. The deep eyes of a light hazel were as full of sorrow as of inspiration; confused pain looked mildly from them, as in a kind of mild astonishment. . . . I have heard Coleridge talk with eager musical energy two stricken hours, his face radiant and moist, and communicate no meaning whatsoever to any individual of his hearers, certain of whom, I for one, still kept eagerly listening in hope; the most had long before given up and formed, if the room were large enough, secondary humming groups of their own. . . . You swam and fluttered in the mistiest, wide, unintelligible deluge of things, for most part in a rather profitless uncomfortable manner. Glorious islets too I have seen rise out of the haze; but they were few, and soon swallowed in the general element again. Balmy sunny islets, islets of the blest and the intelligible;—on which occasions those secondary humming groups would all cease humming and hang breathless upon the eloquent words, till once your islet got wrapt in the mist again, and they would recommence humming. Eloquent, artistically expressive words you always had; piercing radiances of a most subtle insight came at intervals; tones of noble pious sympathy, recognisable as pious, though strangely coloured, were never wanting long."

This is not a reverential description, but no doubt, taking into consideration the keen doubting unawed vision of the gazer, coming from latitudes so different, a true one, and amazingly vivid and real. There are still traces even in this picture of the same man who

entranced the audience in the stage-coach, and made known his identity wherever he went by holding all bystanders suspended, as was the image in those days, on his breath.

He died in 1834 still under the charge of the pair to whose very name a grateful sentiment clings. After all, it is but little Coleridge has left behind him of real importance, less than any one of his contemporaries : and yet for fine poetical fame, the highest ethereal crown which mankind can bestow, there is no one in English literature who has gained a more delicate laurel, or one more unanimously accorded. Far more subtle and spontaneous in the intuitions of spiritual life than Wordsworth, with a sense of mystic meaning infinitely more penetrating and universal than Shelley, there are no others to be compared to him in his generation. The three poems upon which his reputation rests are among the most perfect of the great productions of the age.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, born 1770; died 1850.

Published Descriptive Sketches, 1793.
Lyrical Ballads, 1 vol., 1798.
Lyrical Ballads, 2 vols., with many additions, 1800.
Poems in two volumes, 1807.
These included, among many others of his finest poems, the "Ode," and the "Leech-Gatherer" called "Resolution and Independence."
Tract on the "Convention of Cintra," 1809.
Contributions to the *Friend*, 1809-10.
(Advice to the Young; Essays on Epitaphs.)
Guide to the Lake Country, 1810.
The Excursion, 1814.
The White Doe of Rylstone, 1815.
Peter Bell (written in 1799), 1819.
The Waggoner, 1819.
Sonnets on the River Duddon, 1819.
Memorials of a Tour on the Continent (chiefly sonnets), 1822.
Ecclesiastical Sonnets, 1823.
Yarrow Revisited and other Poems, 1835.
Poems chiefly of Early and Later Years (including Memorials of Tour in Italy), 1842.
The Prelude (after the Poet's death), 1850.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, born 1772; died 1834.

Published Moral and Political Lectures; Conciones ad Populum, etc., 1795.
The Watchman, 1796.
Poems on various subjects, 1796.
Second edition, with additions and various poems of Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd, 1797; third edition, 1803.
Ode to the Departing Year, 1796.
Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner (in Lyrical Ballads), 1798.

Published Various Poems, including Fire, Famine, and Slaughter, in *Morning Post;* reprinted in pamphlet form, 1800.

Translation of Wallenstein, 1800.

Poems originally published in *Morning Post,* reprinted in Southey's Annual Anthology, 1800.

The Friend, 1809-10; another edition in 1818.

The Remorse, 1813.

Christabel, 1816.

A Lay Sermon, 1816.

Another Lay Sermon, 1817.

Biographia Literaria, 1817.

Sibylline Leaves, 1817.

Zapolya, 1817.

Aids to Reflection, 1825.

First collected edition of Poetical and Dramatic works, 1828; another, 1829.

On the Constitution of Church and State, 1830.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROBERT SOUTHEY—WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.

THERE are few stranger accidents in the history of literature than that which has linked the name of Southey to those of the two greater brethren whom we have just discussed. His early association with Coleridge ended so soon that the two poets could have had but little influence upon each other, and though their connection by marriage kept up relations of friendship between them, their minds were as different as day and night. With Wordsworth, Southey had no early connection, and though a sober friendship united them in maturer life, there was no conjoint work, or even literary sympathy, to justify the common appellation of the Lake Poets, by which they were known, in spite of many protests, all their lives, and still to some degree continue to be known. It was not, however, only in poetry that the new age had developed new powers. A new school of critics had sprung up side by side with the new poets, animated by such an impulse of opposition and resistance as gave new force to the name and new importance to the profession. It was their business to require from the men of genius, whom they did their best to quell

and overwhelm and keep in bounds, full proof of their divine commission, and this ungracious but useful office they performed *con amore,* fighting every step of that way to Fame, of which they were the volunteer and often officious guardians. It was in the exercise of this task, and among other skilful ways of depreciating and offending the objects of their care, that the above nickname (always so easy a weapon and so generally popular) was invented. Afterwards there was a "Satanic school," which was not equally effective, but yet had its day.

To compare the philosophical and dreamy Coleridge, with his rare and strange poetical inspirations, the austere and self-absorbed Wordsworth, with his obstinate poetic creed—and that able, precise, and laborious intelligence, always busy and never exhausted, which distinguished the best man of the three, the support and stay of all who trusted in him, the noble, generous, and blameless Southey, is an invidious task. It is not only that one star differeth from another star in glory, but that there is a difference of kind more visible now than when they stood together, putting a gulf between them which neither of them was aware of, and which the critics themselves, for all their acuteness of vision, missed. In life, neither of these, his great contemporaries, was Southey's equal; but in poetry there can be little doubt that this most admirable and excellent of men occupied a very different and a very much lower standing ground. We make the admission with a certain grudge and sense of injustice in the arrange-

ments of Providence. Why should not the most excellent have had the highest gifts? but there is no answer to this question. Southey bore the burdens of all connected with him. He was the friend of all who were in need; his purse and his heart were alike open to all suppliants, and his helping hand never wanting to any one whom he could aid. He worked early and late, well and ill, with a cheerful devotion which no man has ever surpassed, and, though not wiser than other men, was better than other men, both in purity of soul and noble use of his talents. But he did not get the prize from heaven. In his excellence he was left low down in the lower room, and no one said to him, "Come up higher." The others were not so learned nor so painstaking, any more than they were as good. One of them wasted his existence, and was unfaithful to all his duties. The other shut himself up within himself, within the closest domestic circle, and, doing his duty there, did no more. Strange favouritism of heaven! They did not deserve the supreme gift as he did who never got it. But Southey, let us be thankful, was quite unaware of the injustice. He was as sure as either of them of his own immortality,—much more sure, indeed, than Coleridge, whose faulty life and lost opportunities kept him humble. "One overwhelming propensity," the excellent Southey says, "has formed my destiny, and marred all prospects of rank or wealth; but it has made me happy, and *it will make me immortal*. . . . Every generation will afford me some half-dozen admirers, and the everlast-

ing column of Dante's praise does not stand upon a wider basis." Blessed delusion! he went to his grave with it; but it is strange and humiliating to the interested bystander, who cannot but love Southey, to note the extraordinary misapprehension of his own powers and absence of literary discrimination, which could make it possible for him to compare his fame with the "everlasting praise" of Dante. It was well for his own comfort, however, that he could do so.

Southey parted company with Coleridge when he went to Lisbon in 1795. He was there for six months, and on his return plunged at once into the life of a hard-working writer. A similar kind of appointment to that which enabled Coleridge to keep up his cottage at Nether Stowey, an engagement upon a daily newspaper, with chance contributions to the *Monthly Magazine*, etc., afforded to Southey a little certainty of income,—a certainty supplemented by the annuity of £160 a year secured to him by his friend Mr. Wynn on coming of age. Nearly the same sum was given to Coleridge by the Wedgewoods; indeed, all the three poets had a sustenance steady if small, thus provided for them by private friendship, a fine relic of the days when the fortunes of the poet became the special care of his patron. We doubt whether the same generosity would occur to any one now. Southey wandered for some time before deciding upon his home. He began to read law reluctantly, having no liking for anything but literature. Finally, in 1802, after another visit to Portugal, and much wandering, he settled in the Lake district, where

Coleridge was then living. Though they had fallen so much apart, they still kept up an affectionate friendship, and Southey had repeatedly planned in his letters the possibility of a joint household somewhere in the south, where he then hoped to get diplomatic employment. "I shall have so little to do," he writes, speculating on this subject in something of the spirit of the old Pantisocracy, "that my time may be counted my own, and our joint amusements will easily supply all expenses." These joint amusements were the sonnets and occasional verses which made the *Morning Post* and *Courier* of the period memorable. But no diplomatic appointment turned up; and after a second visit to Portugal, and a gradual increase of literary engagements, all ideas of any profession but literature were relinquished. Coleridge had settled for the time in Greta Hall, on the banks of the Greta, near Keswick, and the description which he sent of his house to his brother-in-law was very tempting to a poet. It was a house "on a low hill," commanding beautiful views, the river Greta winding round the slope, and "catching the evening lights in front of the house." Before it lay "a giant's camp, an encamped army of tent-like mountains." Southey had been wandering about Wales, verifying the scenery of his Madoc, when this description reached him. He had just failed in securing a house there, and Coleridge's company was a great temptation to him, as that of her sister was to his wife. They went accordingly, though with some doubts, to the north country, and there remained for

the rest of their lives; there all their children were born, except the first, who died shortly after her birth: and all Southey's joys and sorrows and his endless labours, and his life of cheerful excellence, belong to this odd establishment, where there were three families under one roof, besides the quaint little bachelor apartments of the owner of the house, who occupied one portion of it with his housekeeper till his death.

Coleridge's wanderings have been already described. He was never at home for any lengthened period; and in 1810 finally disappeared from their society; but the three Bristol beauties, who had married the young enthusiasts on the eve of starting for the Pantisocracy on the banks of the Susquehannah, were all collected there,—Mrs. Lovell, a widow, with one child; Sara, once celebrated in tenderest verse, but soon left behind, with her beautiful girl and her infant boys, not much better than a widow, though her husband lived. The happy one was Edith Southey, whose tender and faithful mate never left her side when he could help it, and was the kind brother and helper of the others, the head of this strangely mingled household. Here brothers, friends, everybody who wanted a temporary home, came as to the headquarters of the clan. When the old landlord died, it was a matter of course that his old housekeeper, the beloved of the children, should stay, a member of the overflowing household, till the end. Why should any one leave it? Kindness and love were in the house and radiated from it. Southey was always busy, but never too busy to have a cheer-

ful greeting for all who came, and that tender courtesy of ready attention even to the irrelevant, which is the genius of the heart. There is no more beautiful sight than that of this good man in the midst of the group, the greater part of which, strictly speaking, did not belong to him—the children who had but a secondary claim at the best, and yet were all his, mingled and undistinguishable, in the love and cheerful warmth of the domestic centre, the lovely and serious Sara Coleridge growing up the very twin of his own gay Edith; and, among the rest, that strange and elvish boy, "whose fancies from afar were brought,"—the quaint little "Moses" of whom Southey's letters when he is absent are full, the unfortunate and gentle Hartley, whose life was wrecked by some mysterious reflection of the sins of his fathers before he was born. The house, with that "encampment of mountains" before it, and the river at its feet catching the evening lights: the bookshelves gradually spreading over all the rooms: and the happy voices and soft family commotion surrounding that heart of gentle silence and tranquillity, the study—is delightful to think of. Sorrow came to it, bitter and hard to bear; but yet for years a happier home, a more ideal shelter and refuge and centre of all the charities, was not on earth.

Southey had taken no part in the "Lyrical Ballads," nor does he seem, any more than the merest Philistine of the moment, to have understood or appreciated this publication, which its authors were so anxious to prove to be a new departure. He scarcely knew Wordsworth, indeed, at the time of its publication; and Coleridge's

devotion to the society of his new friend had probably kept him apart from his older connections, and given a shade of prejudice to their minds. A certain impatience and almost intolerance of their crusade against the previous faith and poetical dogmas of England, appears by times, involuntarily, unconsciously, in Southey. He was so busy a man, and had his mind so teeming with schemes and plots for new work, that the obstinate return of Wordsworth to the charge, and his determination to conquer with the very same volume, little enlarged, which had provoked such a storm of disapproval, must naturally have exasperated the buoyant and fertile mind which had so much always ready to pour forth. Coleridge, he thought, had made "the clumsiest attempt at German mysticism I ever saw" in the "Ancient Mariner;" and he had scarcely patience with the men who, full of genius as he knew them to be, did so little, while he was overflowing with work. As for the revolution which was finally accomplished by that publication, Southey was unacquainted with it. He is like a man arranging his books or classifying his antiquities in a library or museum while governments are being overthrown and kingdoms upset outside. He knows nothing about these revolutions; he had not been aware of the want of them, and he did not see the effect when it was accomplished. In Wordsworth's theories at a later period he partially agreed, but he never seems to have perceived that, side by side with the busy wheels of his always working imagination, a power greater than his own was changing altogether the aspect of affairs.

Southey, however, might have taken credit, had he been aware of what was going on, for the fact that he alone of all his contemporaries had never bowed the knee to Baal. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge had begun to write in the recognised poetical style, in the couplets and mechanic tune of which Cowper had complained even while employing it. But Southey, so far, had been original from the beginning; he had spurned that bondage. He was of an orthodox nature, notwithstanding his youthful vagaries; but at the same time he had less reverence than the more truly poetical spirits, and evidently felt no bond of allegiance to those who had gone before. His mind had the independence of extreme energy and activity, an independence which was at once a fault and a virtue—a fault because it gave him over-confidence in his own way, and made his own taste his only real standard. Thus he had no eye for what was wanting at the crisis, no consciousness of a change of current in the stream of literature. He had got into a wild eddy of his own, and was ready to stake his existence on its flow: but he did not even perceive the sweep of the larger river. He was, indeed—at a time, so to speak, of great legislative changes—only a rebel and nothing more. By the fact that he preferred freedom—nay, lawlessness—for himself, he gave a certain aid to the final strokes of the emancipators, but inadvertently and without any real sympathy in their work. He himself never could have belonged to any school, unless he had originated one. We could imagine him, indeed, at the head of a band of young *collabor-*

ateurs, setting them literary tasks by the dozen, and never so pleased as when devising plots and constructing skeletons of endless dramas, epics, fables, and histories, plans which only the limit of individual faculty prevented him from carrying out himself; but it is impossible to conceive of him as working in harmony with other equal or superior minds, or in subordination to a greater purpose than his own.

The following extract from a letter to one of his faithful friends will show how his "barmy noddle" was continually at work:—

"I have some plots maturing in my head, but none ripe. My wish is to make something better than love the mainspring, and I have one or two sketches; but all my plots seem rather calculated to produce one or two great scenes than a general effect. My mind has been turned too much to the epic, which admits a longer action and passes over the uninteresting parts.

"The escape of the Pythoness with a young Thessalian seems to afford most spectacle. If you have 'Diodorus Siculus' at hand, and will refer to Lib. 16, p. 428, you may find all the story, for I know no more than the fact. Pedro the Just pleases me best; this is my outline" (then follows a detailed description) . . . "This is a half-plot, you see, capable of powerful scenes, but defective in general interest, I fear. I have thought of a domestic story, founded on the persecution under Queen Mary. To this my objection is that I cannot well conclude it without burning my hero, or making the queen die very *à propos*, which is cutting the knot and not letting the catastrophe necessarily arise from previous circumstances. However, the story pleases me, because I have a fine Catholic woman and her confessor in it.

"For feudal times something might be made, perhaps, of a fief (feud ?) with a wicked lord, or of the wardship oppressions; but what will young Colman's play be ? It may forestall me.

"Then I have thought of Sparta, of the Crypteia, and a Helot hero; but this would be interpreted into sedition. Of Florida and the customary sacrifice of the first-born male; in this case to have a European father and an escape. Sebastian comes into my thoughts, and Beatrix of Milan accused by Oronbello on the rack and executed. A Welsh or English story would be better; but fix where I will, I will be well acquainted with country, manners, etc. . . . You have these views as they float before me."

It is scarcely possible that a man with all these plans in his head should have had much sympathy with the method of the others, who meant to change the face of literature with "Alice Fell" and "Lucy Gray." He went along his nimble way while they were musing, always in earnest, always at full strain of production, elaborating notes when he was not writing poetry, and with his eyes ever open on old bookstalls and new publications for facts, which might verify the details of his old subjects, or suggest new. His workmanship was as conscientious as his invention was boundless. "Yesterday I finished 'Madoc,' thank God," he writes, "and thoroughly to my satisfaction. But I have resolved on one great laborious and radical alteration. It was my design to identify 'Madoc' with 'Mango Capoc,' the legislator of Peru. In this I have totally failed; therefore '*Mango Capoc' is to be the hero of another poem*, and instead of carrying 'Madoc' down the Marañon, I shall follow the more probable opinion and land him in Florida. Here, instead of the Peruvians, who have no striking manners for my poem, we get among the wild North American Indians. On their customs and superstitions

facts must be grounded and woven into the work, spliced so neatly as not to betray the junction. So much for 'Madoc;' it is a great work done, and my brain is now ready for the Dom Daniel, the next labour in succession." Thus the wheels go round and one subject succeeds another.

Southey accomplished in the midst of all his other labours five long and important poems—three belonging to the vague world of mediæval life, where picturesque effects abound, and where fact is capable of transmutation—and two to the region of pure fable. Through all a serious and lofty purpose flows, though with a certain monotony. In all we are called to attend a heroic deliverer, or still more heroic penitent, through all that the powers of evil can do against him. In "Joan of Arc" the struggle is single. It is against the enemies of her country. But Madoc, the emigrant prince, has two phases, and after we have got him safely delivered from trouble in his own country, he has a savage conflict to go through in the new world before his power is established and his colony consolidated. The struggle of "Roderick the Goth" ends only in death. He is a despairing sinner when we see him first on the field of a lost battle; but soon the most sublime of penitents. In all the motive is the same; virtue almost superhuman, courage of the most dauntless kind, love of the purest—even Roderick, though it is supposed to have been by the most dastardly of vices that he brought down Count Julian's vengeance and the Moors upon him, is washed white not only by his repentance, but by extenuating circumstances,

which take all the darker shades out of his offence, and make it indeed no greater than that of Paolo and Francesca, the pair for whom all the world mourns. There is no divided purpose, no contending sympathies in these poems; they are straightforward moral romances, in which heroic virtue always gains the day. The wild eastern framework of "Thalaba" and "Kehama" gives a new aspect to the same old conclusion, but the purpose is still the same. Here, however, the poet goes wildly into waters unexplored and wastes unknown. They are the productions most characteristic of him, as being like nothing else in the range of English verse. In no way can we show so clearly the difference between Southey and his great contemporaries, as by comparing one of these poems with Coleridge's first memorable production: the purpose of which, professedly, was so to suspend the reader's judgment in respect to probabilities, that the supernatural should take hold of his mind with all the force of reality. To accomplish this he required no magic, no unearthly spells or terrors. "There was a ship, said he"—and forthwith the mists that veil the unseen trembled, and the great spiritual world outside of us—which every human soul is conscious of, or at the least suspects, became somehow apparent in glimpses, in touches, though without either contact or sight, a something wider and stranger than even the wide and terrible sea which opened like a picture before every reader. But Southey's method is not like this. His imagination has nothing to do with common existence, nor can he open those

secret portals which go straight into the darkness. What he does to awaken our wonder and our curiosity is to make a wild and strange picture of life, in which none of the circumstances are recognisable, and fill it with magical appliances not more strange or unknown than itself. If we are once persuaded to take any interest in the romantic existence of a Thalaba, we can have no difficulty in receiving along with him all the magicians that plot against him, for they are at least as real and in no way more unlike ordinary experience than he. Here is no question of that contact between the visible and invisible which at once excites and bewilders the faculties, and confuses our mind with a vain endeavour to discriminate, to keep hold upon the real, while the unreal grows before us in a truth that is more convincing than fact, yet is fiction. These are efforts altogether beyond the simple straightforward agencies of the lesser poet. The practical character of his mind, instead of weakening the romance in him, or subduing a very wilful and fantastic imagination, supports both as by an iron framework, working out these visionary creations into matter of fact details, and making the wildest machinery of invention "practicable." Thalaba and Kehama are both of the straightforward character of fairy tales — they are homogeneous, their most simple figures being as little like ordinary humanity as the incidents of their career are like the facts of life. Probability has nothing to do with them; they are wildly unreal, but always matter of fact. Coleridge, though he

holds us breathless, takes no trouble to make us understand why so many and such terrible penalties were exacted from the Mariner, and the gentle moral into which he drops at the end of his mystic narrative falls upon us with the most confusing sense of incompleteness, without in the least breaking the extraordinary spell of that dream which is inexplainable — which we have no wish to have explained. But about Southey there is no such difficulty. We understand it all perfectly. There is nothing left for our imagination, no uncertainty, nothing inadequate or without balance. We are prepared for all the magicians and the enchantments: none of these things ever surprise us. Spells are uttered freely which move earth and heaven; but they do not move us. We accompany the hero quite placidly to the foreseen adventure at the end of his career, and are not in the least astonished even by the Dom Daniel caves, though Southey, with his usual practical-romantic and elephantine-humorous style, thinks of setting on foot a calculation as to how much our earth would be affected by the destruction of those caverns supposed to lie at its centre. This was the kind of elaborate joke that pleased him. At his wildest his foot never abandons the earth. There is no flight in him, nor is there any world unfathomed into which even for a moment he can carry us in a trance of suspended living, in a lightning gleam of sudden discovery; nothing of that ethereal kind: but for sorceries and charms and straightforward magic, there is nobody like him. He could tell us the very

shape of the shovel with which fuel is piled on to those central fires.

Kehama is still more matter of fact in its wildness than Thalaba. We are here in the presence of an almost almighty man, who, by his magic, is gradually getting possession not only of earth but heaven. But heaven and earth are indistinguishable, and our minds are wearied, not excited, by the monotonous wonders which accumulate so steadily and fit in so exactly into the elaborate tale. It is in this poem that one of those few pieces of verse occurs, which alone, of all Southey's voluminous works, have taken the ear of the world. Of the many volumes he has left behind him besides, only one or two ballads have secured a place in the general memory, and, so far as we are aware, no child learns, no memory retains, any of the scenes of Madoc or Roderick, though some of these are picturesque enough to deserve a better fate. The address to Love in Kehama, he himself declared to be clap-trap, and resented the selection of it as an example of the poem; in which he was right enough, for it is no fair example of the poem, and it does partake of the nature of clap-trap, that sublimated mixture of commonplace and sentiment which always delights the multitude:—

> "They sin who tell us Love can die.
> With life all other passions fly,
> All others are but vanity.
> In Heaven Ambition cannot dwell,
> Nor Avarice in the vaults of Hell;

Earthly these passions of the Earth,
They perish where they have their birth;
But Love is indestructible.
Its holy flame for ever burneth,
From Heaven it came, to Heaven returneth;
Too oft on Earth a troubled Guest,
At times deceived, at times opprest,
It here is tried and purified,
Then hath in Heaven its perfect rest:
It soweth here with toil and care,
But the harvest time of Love is there.

Oh! when a Mother meets on high
The Babe she lost in infancy,
Hath she not then, for pains and fears,
The day of woe, the watchful night,
For all her sorrow, all her tears,
An over-payment of delight?"

There are many Englishmen, not too ignorant, who know this and nothing more, of Robert Southey's long and elaborate poem, which he constructed with such care, and for which he hoped not the vulgar fame of popularity, but an audience fit though few, extending downward through the generations. The reader will feel a certain shame yet pleasure to know that in his own mind he had no doubt on this point. He believed that his fame would go on increasing and rest upon as wide a basis as Dante's. He chid his friend for calling him the most sublime poet of the age, not that he had any difficulty in accepting the title, but because "both Wordsworth and Landor are at least my equals." Poor Southey! One smiles yet weeps over the delusion.

And it is difficult to believe that Southey

aided in any perceptible way in the poetical revolution of the time. His freedom of poetic diction was as entirely unlike that for which Wordsworth contended, as his Oriental magic was like the mystic and visionary insight of Coleridge. The *Edinburgh Review,* in its first number, begins a critical notice of Thalaba by a disquisition upon the style of the *sect,* of which the author of Thalaba was, it believed, "one of the chief apostles and champions," which, while evidently aimed at Wordsworth and his theory, was ludicrously inappropriate to Southey, who had never professed any belief in homeliness of expression, and never abandoned the elevated language usually adopted in poetry. But the critic concludes by a more real identification of the kind of lawlessness in which Southey did indulge. Thalaba, he allows, is entirely free from the simplicities of the "Lyrical Ballads;" but it has at the same time a freedom of its own, much more extravagant in license, and still less justified by precedent.

"The first thing that strikes the reader of Thalaba," says Jeffrey (after he has ended his discourse upon the peculiarities of a totally different style), "is the singular structure of the versification, which is a jumble of all the measures that are known in English poetry (and a few more), without rhyme, and without any sort of regularity in their arrangement. . . . Every combination of different measures is apt to perplex and disturb the reader who is not familiar with it, and we are never reconciled to a sentence of a new structure till we have accustomed our ear to it by two or three repetitions. This is the case even where we have the assistance of rhyme to direct us in our search after regularity, and where the definite form and appearance of a stanza assures us that regularity is to be found. When both of

these are wanting, it may be imagined that our condition will be still more deplorable, and a compassionate author might even excuse us if we were unable to distinguish this kind of verse from prose. . . . The author, however, entertains a different opinion of it. . . . He is persuaded that its melody is more obvious and perceptible than that of our vulgar measures. 'One advantage,' says Mr. Southey, 'this metre assuredly possesses,—the dullest reader cannot distort it into discord; he may read it with a *prose mouth*, but its flow and fall will still be perceptible.'"

The writer proceeds with characteristic malice to quote various passages in which "the flow and fall" are very confusing and eccentric. Thus Southey demonstrates once more what we have called, for want of a better term, the imaginative matter-of-factness of his mind. It was not for him to see the beauty that lay in the simplest untaught phrases of nature, which Wordsworth, though with many mistakes and much lack of critical discrimination—as well as a certain arrogance of belief that he was the first to see and use them—had divined: but he caught the principle by a side twist, and adopted it in his own way, turning the freedom into lawlessness, yet of this very license making once more a rigid machinery of odd and strained and unnatural measures, distinguished less for beauty than for defiance of all previous custom and harmony. Like all spurious freedom, it seemed to go farther and cut itself adrift more completely from previous bondage than the real and moderate emancipation which is founded upon a genuine principle. It is possible that thus in its dash and bravado of irregu-

larity, the poetry of Thalaba and Kehama assisted, especially with the vulgar, in detaching the last of the chains of Pope and precedent.

This mixture of daring independence and impatience of control, with a certain innate orthodoxy of mind, was very characteristic of Southey. In the method which struck his fancy he would have his fling regardless who opposed him, but he could not construct anything that was not built upon an actual foundation. His scenery and enchantments are not only, as we have said, always "practicable," to use theatrical language, but they are all punctiliously founded on fact, not a cantrip that does not hold its footing on some legend, not a spell that has not been got out of some tradition. Yet the language in which these wild yet perfectly matter-of-fact operations are narrated is beyond rule, and put together in defiance both of precedent and English custom. The measure was his own invention, and he held by it notwithstanding his certainty that it would not please the public, nor commend itself to the English ear. In "Kehama," indeed, he went even farther, mixing this novel measure with interjections of rhyme at his will, and content, if he pleased his own ear, to leave his readers to make the best they could of the unfamiliar medley. This lawlessness and caprice, existing along with the most dutiful subordination to fact and knowledge, are apparent in no other poet of the day. Southey's sympathy with the conventionally wild and weird, with the eccentric and fantastic, wherever he found them, is exceedingly curious. One of the

liveliest friendships of his life, the tie which we must shortly discuss, which bound him to Walter Savage Landor, a man whose strange personality has disappeared but a short time since from among us, and who of all the men of his time was perhaps the most lawless, the most undisciplined, the wildest embodiment of human caprice known to recent times, is a case in point.

Southey's other long poems stand upon a different footing; their length itself is perhaps the most remarkable thing about them. They have faded away notwithstanding some beauty of description and much tenderness of sentiment, more completely perhaps than they deserve. "Joan of Arc" is so long-winded in expression, and so inadequate in conception, that nobody can regret it, and it was a very youthful production, and might well have been sacrificed had its successors profited by its fall. But this unfortunately is what they did not do. They were all composed with care and pains unspeakable. "So very laboriously was 'Madoc' re-written and corrected time after time, that I will pledge myself, if you ask me in any instance why one word stands in the place of another . . . to give you a reason which will convince you that I had previously weighed both in the balance." And Southey went to Wales on purpose to make himself sure of the scenery, and accumulated as much learning in his notes as would not have misbecome the most authentic and dignified history. We can but say alas! when all is done. How is it that the effect does not follow? Here there is every-

thing but one thing, the altar laid, the sacrifice extended, the faggots ready as in that famous offering prepared by the priests of Baal: but the divine spark is wanting, and no touch from heaven sets it alight. Roderick is a little more vigorous, but the wild and guilty Goth is made into so exemplary a penitent, and even his crime is so smoothed down and pared away, that the fierce story is turned into a pathetic romance of the sentimental-religious kind, and though happiness is indeed postponed until the heavenly meeting to which all look forward, it is so certain that the most exacting stickler for a good end must be satisfied. The story of Roderick was in favour at this particular moment. It was taken as the subject of a drama by Savage Landor, and Scott also made use of one incident in the tale. Landor's "Count Julian" has been greatly applauded though little read, but we think we need not hesitate to give the palm, such as it is, to Southey. Scott's poem is little more than a rhetorical account of the revolutions which were to run over Spain, with special reference to the heroes of the Peninsular war, and Roderick has very little to do with it. But of the two friends who treated this tragical episode of history, neither has succeeded in impressing it upon the mind of the reader. Southey's poem is one to be read in the leisure of youth, when the soul has an unbounded capacity for verse, if indeed now in these days of examinations youth has any more leisure than the rest of us for reading which "does not pay;" but it will never out of that gentle obscurity lay hands upon any one, or compel the alteration of

the world's verdict. The half-dozen *âmes d'élite*, who were to be Southey's ever-increasing audience, and make him immortal, have disappointed his expectations, and all those labours and hopes, and that ardour of poetic energy, are but so much waste. "Few persons will like 'Kehama,'" he says himself; "everybody will wonder at it; it will increase my reputation without increasing my popularity. A general remark will be, what a pity that I have wasted so much power." And then he consoles himself with the thought of the half-dozen admirers which "every generation" would afford him. We grudge their non-existence, and our own inability to be one of them, for Southey's sake; but, on earth at least, he never knew: and if he became aware of it afterwards, probably he had learned by that time the secret of greater poetry. We must hope that *amour propre*, and vanity, whatever may be said for more lofty sentiments, do not outlive the grave.

In the very end of the century, when Southey, out of health and out of spirits, but busy, as always, was preparing for a second expedition to Lisbon, he fell upon a small and flimsy publication printed "by a small bookseller at Warwick, in the form of a sixpenny pamphlet," which took him by storm. It was called "Gebir," and was the work of a young man who had shared something of his own fate at the University, an unruly youth who had left his college in disgrace, and was already an Ishmael of private life, with his hand against every man, and a strong conviction that every man's hand was against him. The

poem was a very strange one, wildly unintelligible and confused, so far as its story goes, but with gleams of strange beauty in it like "flashes of lightning at midnight," as Southey afterwards said. It charmed his congenial mind at once. With eager generosity he hailed the advent of the new poet, in the *Critical Review*, to which he was then a contributor, and spread its reputation privately among all his friends. "You will find in it some of the most exquisite poetry in the language," he says to one; to another, that "it has miraculous beauties. I would go a hundred miles to see the anonymous author." When he went off upon his journey he took "Gebir" among his few books. A sort of love at first sight moved him towards the brother-soul who had produced it. When he heard the name of the author, he cudgelled his brains to remember him at Oxford, where all he could recollect was that he had the character of being a "mad Jacobin." Southey was not clear that there was not even now something not quite sound in the brain of the new writer. The poem was like "the miraculous work of a madman," he said to William Taylor, probably feeling less safe in his enthusiasm with that excellent bourgeois-critic. For nobody else whom he encountered in his maturer life does he express the same interest. When he met at last, several years later, with this friend of his imagination, he speaks of the encounter with almost rapturous satisfaction.

"At Bristol I met the man, of all others, whom I was most desirous of meeting—Savage Landor, the author of 'Gebir.' I never saw any one more unlike myself in every prominent part

of human character, nor any one who so cordially and instinctively agreed with me on so many of the most important subjects. I have often said before we met that I would walk forty miles to see him, and having seen him, I would gladly walk fourscore to see him again. He talked of 'Thalaba,' and I told him of the series of mythological poems which I had planned, mentioned some of the leading incidents on which they were to have been formed, and also told him for what reason they were laid aside—in plain English, that I could not afford to write them. Landor's reply was, 'Go on with them, and I will pay for printing them, as many as you will write, and as many copies as you please.' 'I had reconciled myself' (says Southey, in a burst of mingled pride and humility, and grateful enthusiasm) 'to my abdication, if the phrase may be allowed, and am not sure that this princely offer has not done me mischief: for it has awakened in me old dreams and hopes which have been laid aside, and a stinging desire to go on, for the sake of showing him poem after poem, and saying—I need not accept your offer, but I have done this because you made it. It is something to be praised by one's peers.' "

This proposal of generous extravagance is the best manner of introduction which we could find for Landor. It was entirely characteristic of the man. Born to a good estate, and with the habits of wealth, he was ready to lavish assistance—at least in intention—upon all with whom he sympathised; and if it seldom came about that his intentions could be realised, that was less his fault than the fault of circumstances, of unkind fortune which deprived him of the means, but never of the will to aid. Landor's biographer, Mr. John Forster, suggests, with great ingenuity, that Southey admired in Landor the terseness and concentration of thought which were so wanting in himself, the rich conglomerate of fancy too closely pressed and heaped together to give fair play

to all its beauties, which formed such a contrast to his own natural diffuseness and long-drawn fluency. But the friendship was far more than a merely poetical one, and there can be little doubt, we think, that that latent love of the strange and extravagant, which had so little outlet in his own dutiful and self-controlled life, attracted Southey to the most bizarre of all the many eccentrics who have borne the name of men of letters. There were various more reasonable points of meeting between them; they were both fond of learning, of out-of-the-way studies, of books in the fullest sense of the word—both running over with impetuous activity and independence, both generous and hasty. But the one who had tamed himself into steady work, and weighted himself with unusual burdens, and set aside the fantastic occupation he loved for the less delightful trade by which he lived—felt his imagination emancipated from all these bondages when he saw a man bound by none of them, who had flung off all restraints and behaved as he liked, in a subject and wondering world. From the beginning to the end of his career, Southey seems never to have indulged in a laugh at his friend's wild explosions, or at the ups and downs of a mind so precariously balanced that every breath affected its equilibrium. He was always respectful, even of Landor's wildest vagaries, and treated his fits of overwhelming despair and of passionate offence with equal seriousness, refusing to look at the ridiculous side. Southey was equally loyal to his early friendship for Coleridge, and had the most undoubting faith in his genius, and

admiration for it; but Coleridge's weaknesses were not of a kind with which he had any sympathy; and with none of the "peers," whose applause was so sweet to him, did the author of "Thalaba" stand on such an invariably tender and brotherly footing as with this wild and uncontrolled rebel against all the respectabilities. It does not seem too bold an assumption to say that here once more the extravagant-practical, the imaginative matter-of-fact, which was a characteristic of Southey's mind, affected his liking. Landor was an embodiment such as he loved of the poetic nature. He was romance made into fact, a sort of naked and unveiled genius, with all the movements of his inspired soul visible to the eye, and no coverings of reason or common sense, or any other of the draperies with which ordinary persons conceal themselves from the world, to make him like other men.

This extraordinary being was the son of a race of country gentlemen possessing ease and breeding, and a comfortable standing ground upon the soil. His own father had adopted the profession of a doctor, in those days when every local district had its own little metropolis, and Warwick was to Warwickshire what London is now to every county in England. Dr. Landor occupied the largest house in the little town, and was more than a professional man—a person of local importance, heir to a good estate, the husband in succession of two heiresses, and altogether a dignified figure in the little world, more individual, more independent, than any provincial society now-a-days, to which he belonged. He had a number of children,

the eldest of whom was the future poet—a boy very soon to make himself remarkable, and the greatest plague that a sober-minded household could have had. He was heir of entail both to his father's and mother's property; and no doubt, in his restless vivacity, wild temper, and budding genius, a very important member of the doctor's household. Fabulous stories are told of his feats of strength and athletic skill, and reckless vagaries at school; but these seem to merit little attention. Insubordinate, undisciplined, yielding to every fancy that crossed his mind, and plunging into every unreasonable freak that tempted him, he evidently was, and continued to be, all his life. His manners were as eccentric as his mind. He was greatly given to "riotous laughter," "a long loud laugh hardly less than leonine," sounding "higher and higher, peal after peal, in continuous and increasing volleys until regions of sound were reached very far beyond ordinary human lungs;" but the jokes that produced this hurricane of mirth do not seem to have been remarkable for brilliancy. He was distinguished at school, where "Play-day for Landor's Latin verses" was a pleasure which his old school-fellows long remembered—but was too fastidious and proud ever to compete for any distinction. At Oxford he spent only a year and a half, retiring compulsorily from his college (Trinity) in consequence of a foolish freak. Nothing can be more strange than to note (once more) how entirely independent of those influences of the Universities which are considered of sovereign importance to English youth was the generation of poets to which Landor belonged.

They were none of them devoid of a love of learning, yet of the four mentioned up to this time—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Landor—only one took his degree, and he the least learned, the least academical, of all. One wonders if the next generation of poets will be more inclined towards those regions in which they "wear the gown."

Landor was "a mad Jacobin," according to Southey's recollection, in his college days. He was wildly excited, like all the rest, by the French Revolution and American independence, and the fever of freedom that was in the air. "I was about the first student who wore his hair without powder," he says. "'Take care,' said my tutor; 'they will stone you for a republican.'" Southey, too, took this wildly revolutionary step. They were at Oxford at the same time—next door to each other, so to speak, in Baliol and Trinity, the two powderless long-haired youths. Young men of genius, real or supposed, seem to have a curious propensity towards long hair. These haunts of learning are not destitute of them now; but they talk art at this moment more than poetry, and know little of the fervid energy of politics, the more manly inspiration which then fired every youthful soul, and promised Utopias, if not Paradises, of freedom and emancipation to come. Landor was as little disposed to produce his acquirements in public, or to acquire prizes by them, at Oxford as at Rugby. When he composed some more than usually exquisite piece of Latin verse, he read it to his chosen friends, and concealed it from the authorities. His first poem, "Gebir," already alluded to,

which belongs to the period after he left college, while he was still only twenty, was composed partly in Latin, with a curious indifference to, or ignorance of, any larger world than that to which Latin would be as acceptable as English. This strange recklessness and contempt of general appreciation was conjoined in after times with much violent and bitter resentment of the indifference of the public, though he had himself so very broadly evidenced his contempt of its opinion. But Landor attained what Southey has failed to attain, if not the appreciation of the general reader, at least a considerable degree of enthusiasm and worship from that higher class which has the honours of literary reputation in its hands—if not, perhaps, the simpler universal crown of fame.

"Gebir" was written in the course of some wild wanderings in Wales, whither he strayed after his college disgrace, when his father's displeasure, and his own excited and restless spirit, made home little attractive to him. It was founded upon an Eastern tale, which he picked up accidentally out of a chance volume; but, indeed, it is to be hoped that this nameless book gave the incidents more clearly than the young poet interpreted them. Even Southey, the one admirer who stood its champion, did not make any boast of understanding it. He was content to admire the "exquisite poetry" in it, the gleams of miraculous beauty. His description of it as "a picture in whose obscure colouring no plan was discoverable, but in whose every distinct touch the master hand was visible," is sufficiently true. The common reader is

harder to please in this respect than the expert; he wants to know what he is reading about, what is the story, and who are the personages of the tale, if it is a tale. This is only to be gleaned by intense application, by the "flashes of lightning at midnight" to which Southey compared the intelligible passages. By these the reader makes out two male personages—a mysterious Prince Gebir, who has invaded Egypt, and an equally mysterious shepherd, his brother, who is keeping the prince's flocks hard by. How it was that the flocks accompanied the army in so peaceful and pastoral a manner is as little explained to us as how it was that the brother of the prince was the shepherd. So it is, and that is enough in those realms of fancy and impetuous youth, above all interpretations. The female personages are Charoba, Queen of Egypt, a visionary ancestress, we should suppose, of Cleopatra, and a sea-nymph, who woos Tamor, the shepherd, by a wrestling match, and at last carries him off to her home of bliss in the sea; while Gebir, less fortunate, is killed in the midst of his bridal feast by a poisoned mantle which Charoba's nurse has sought in a magical city of antiquity for the destruction of the invader—the idea being that peaceful love attains what war and violence forfeit. All this, however, is beyond the grasp of the ordinary reader, who has no clue to guide him through the waste; but "the flashes of lightning" are fine, and if not "the most exquisite poetry in the language," are still very well worth looking at. There is very little difference of opinion as to which passages embody the flashes thus described. The same quotation reappears

wherever this strange poem is referred to. There is one in particular in regard to which Landor was very fond of congratulating himself in after days, that Wordsworth had put it in his pocket and made use of the pretty notion. It is very pretty, like a delicate bit of workmanship in alabaster, or some such fairy material, but we doubt whether it has become one of "the priceless possessions of English poetry," as Mr. Forster says :—

"And I have sinuous shells of pearly hue
Within, and they that lustre have imbibed
In the sun's palace porch, where when unyoked
His chariot-wheel stands midway in the wave.
Shake one, and it awakens, then apply
Its polished lips to your attentive ear,
And it remembers its august abodes
And murmurs as the ocean murmurs there."

This is charmingly pretty, much as the shell itself is, a curiosity to be put in the daintiest collection—but we think not much more. Anything which it is so easy to detach from its setting, and hand about for the admiration of the assistants, is always of doubtful excellence in poetry. A much finer effect, and one indeed which touches upon the sublime of human feeling, is that in which the disappointment of Charoba with one of the greatest sights in nature—great yet so much less than infinite imagination expected—is expressed :

"Past are three summers since she first beheld
The ocean ; all around the child await
Some exclamation of amazement : here
She coldly said, her long-lash't eyes abased,
Is *this the mighty ocean?* is *this all!*"

The sickness of the wondrous soul which was

> "Capacious then as earth or heaven could hold
> Soul discontented with capacity—"

never able to see, or hear, or fathom half enough to satisfy its larger requirements, is a perception far beyond any graceful metaphor or delicate description. It is more like the mystic insight of Coleridge, to whom all those depths were native, than anything in Southey's more precise and limited nature. So far as we are able to judge, this note struck by chance at twenty is one of the highest notes Landor ever struck. He produced a full-grown drama afterwards, a good deal of verse, and much poetical prose—but he scarcely ever attained this height of delicate insight again.

"Hardly a hundred copies were sold" of the book, and De Quincey boasted that he and Southey were the only two people who had read it, an assertion which, much as Landor loved Southey, irritated him and his friends. It was afterwards republished "in a much better edition, with a Latin translation;" Latin or English, the vehicle was indifferent to the boy poet, who perhaps was most confident on the whole of his powers in the older language, and indifferent to the limitation which this would have made in his audience—nay, rather pleased with the limitation. He would have scorned the vulgarity of a fame which was in everybody's mouth.

The career of Landor was full of storm and tumult, and it must be added of the strangest sincere

braggadocio, vanity, generosity, and extravagance throughout. When his father died, he sold all that could be sold of his inheritance to buy a romantic property in Wales, Llanthony Abbey, where he believed himself to have planted a million of trees, and began to build an impracticable never-to-be finished house. Here he quarrelled with all his surroundings, and did everything that in him lay to make the neighbourhood too hot to hold him, while at the same time his hasty and unpractical nature was imposed upon on all sides. He soon found the Welsh peasants about him to be savages, and the country gentlemen to be without a spark of public feeling. Every class of society joined in league to persecute and disturb him; his farmers did not pay their rent (though no theory of justification for that omission existed in those days), and Landor, after throwing away the greater part of his fortune, went off in profound offence and bitterness to Italy, where he lived for most of the remainder of his life. His stormy progress through the world was without any of the dignity which sometimes attends a passionate rebel against the ways of the world. He was too noisy, too eccentric, for any pomp of injured feeling or intellectual suffering. He stormed through his life, with violent puffs of smoke and fire, more like a runaway steam-engine, fuming, creaking, snorting, exploding, tearing along the resounding way, than any grander fugitive. He married, rather, apparently, because he had been lucky enough to find a perfectly unsuitable person, than for any other motive. In

after years, long after Llanthony had ceased to be anything but a burden and a trouble to him, he stumbled into a lovely spot upon his own natural inheritance, and asked passionately why he had not been persuaded to buy that instead of Llanthony, altogether unaware that he had himself sold it in order to purchase the imaginary paradise of the other. It would be difficult to find a better example of the hot-headed haste and confusion of the mind, which never saw anything but what it happened to be gazing at for the moment, and saw that through a wild illumination of impetuous fancy.

His only other important poetical work was the drama of "Count Julian," written shortly after. This is praised in terms so lofty by various excellent critics, that the simple reader, if the drama ever gained any such, would find it difficult to account for his disappointment in presence of their enthusiasm. "Landor's style is here at its best, and contemporary poetry has nothing to show beyond 'Count Julian' in purity or in grandeur," says Mr. Forster. "Mr. Landor," says de Quincey, "who always rises with his subject, . . . is probably the one man in Europe that has adequately conceived the situation, the stern self-dependency, and the monumental misery of Count Julian. That sublimity of penitential grief which cannot accept consolation from man, cannot bear external reproach, cannot condescend to notice insult, cannot so much as see the curiosity of bystanders; that awful carelessness of all but the troubled deeps within his own heart and of God's spirit, brooding upon their surface,

and searching their abysses, never was so majestically described." This is very high praise, but we find it difficult to assent to it. The position of Count Julian is one which might indeed be "majestically described," and is worthy of the hand which showed us Hamlet and Othello, each in the centre of a world which had crumbled about him, undermined by that falsehood which is the death of every possibility. A powerful Spanish noble, next to the king in dignity and influence, who in an hour of agonised fury, finding his daughter outraged by the monarch, calls in the aid of the Moors to revenge his quarrel and overthrow his enemy—but this done, sees for the first time that his frenzy of personal vengeance has lost his country, and that in driving Roderick from the field, he has put the yoke of the unbeliever upon the neck of Spain—is such a hero as demands the hand of the highest genius. After the last terrible battle, in which not only Roderick but his country is destroyed, the fugitive king puts himself into the power of his enemy. But Julian is too noble, too merciful, and at the same time too magnaminous, too contemptuous, to take the life of the wretched and vanquished fugitive. The Moors, when they know that the king has escaped by his permission, fall upon him as a traitor, and Muza, their chief, condemns him to death. We quote a part of this scene, for the book is in few hands, and the reader otherwise might find it difficult to form an opinion of his own on the subject—

"MUZA.

Away with him!

JULIAN.

Slaves! not before I lift
My voice to heaven and man: though enemies
Surround me, and none else, yet other men
And other times shall hear: the agony
Of an opprest and of a bursting heart
No violence can silence; at its voice
The trumpet is o'erpower'd, and glory mute,
And peace and war hide all their charms alike.
Surely the guests and ministers of heaven
Scatter it forth through all the elements,
So suddenly, so widely, it extends,
So fearfully men breathe it, shuddering
To ask or fancy how it first arose.

MUZA.

Yes, they shall shudder: but will that, henceforth,
Molest my privacy, or shake my power?

JULIAN.

Guilt hath pavilions, but no privacy.
The very engine of his hatred checks
The torturer in his transport of revenge,
Which, while it swells his bosom, shakes his power,
And raises friends to his worst enemy.

MUZA.

Where now are thine? will they not curse the day
That gave thee birth, and hiss thy funeral!
Thou has left none that could have pitied thee.

JULIAN.

Many, nor those alone of tenderer mould,
For me will weep; many, alas, through me!
Already I behold my funeral;
The turbid cities wave and swell with it,
And wrongs are lost in that day's pageantry:
Opprest and desolate, the countryman
Receives it like a gift; he hastens home,
Shows where the hoof of Moorish horse laid waste
His narrow croft and winter garden-plot,
Sweetens with fallen pride his children's loss,
And points their hatred, but applauds their tears.
Justice, who came not up to us through life,
Loves to survey our likeness on our tombs,
When rivalry, malevolence, and wrath,
And every passion that once storm'd around,
Is calm alike without them as within.
Our very chains make the whole world our own,
Bind those to us who else had past us by,
Those at whose call brought down to us, the light
Of future ages lives upon our name.

MUZA.

I may accelerate that meteor's fall,
And quench that idle ineffectual light
Without the knowledge of thy distant world.

JULIAN.

My world and thine are not that distant one.
Is age less wise, less merciful, than grief,
To keep this secret from thee, poor old man?
Thou canst not lessen, canst not aggravate
My sufferings, canst not shorten or extend
Half a sword's length between my God and me.
I thank thee for that better thought than fame,

Which none however, who deserve, despise,
Nor lose from view till all things else are lost.
. . . . . .

Yet we, alive or dead, have fellow-men
If ever we have served them, who collect
From prisons and from dungeons our remains,
And bear them in their bosoms to their sons.
Man's only relics are his benefits;
These, be there ages, be there worlds, between,
Retain him in communion with his kind:
Hence is our solace, our security,
Our sustenance, till heavenly truth descends,
Covering with brightness and beatitude
The frail foundations of these humbler hopes,
And, like an angel guiding us, at once
Leaves the loose chain and iron gate behind."

This idea is fine, but we think dwelt on at much too great length. The emancipation of the wronged and injured the moment they have received the fatal blow—the remorseful compensation which the world offers them, when there is nothing else left to give—is too consolatory and gentle a thought to have been the last thought of a man, conscious not only of great wrongs and sorrows, but of having been the instrument, by his own vengeance, of his country's calamity. Neither at such a tremendous moment is so long a strain of level verse enough for the necessities of the crisis. Even allowing that passion is swallowed up in the calm of supreme misery, yet no misery can be supreme which retains this consolation. It is the language of noble resignation and virtue, not the confused and bewildering death-song of a man, who

heedlessly, without thought, has brought down, in avenging his own wrongs, a torrent of ruin upon the innocent, and finds it out to give bitterness to his end before he dies.

Landor, however, as well as his critics, was satisfied with "Count Julian," and the negotiations about its publication are amusing and characteristic. He described its writing to Southey with a little of his favourite and habitual brag. "I believe I am the first man who ever wrote the better part of a tragedy in a concert-room. . . . It cannot be well done, written with such amazing rapidity; in forty hours I have *done* a thousand lines." Soon, however, he modifies this statement. "My rapidity in the composition was not so great as I led you to imagine. My hours were four or five together after long walks, in which I brought before me the various characters, the very tones of their voices, their forms, complexions, and step. In the daytime I laboured, and at night unburdened my mind, shedding many tears." But what was to be done with it was now the question. It ought to be printed—or perhaps rather produced on the stage. It was supposed that the character of "Count Julian" would suit Kemble—and at last Southey suggested that he should take it to London and offer it. Then Landor's pride took fire. "'Count Julian' shall never lie at Kemble's feet. It must not be offered for representation. I will print it, and immediately." It was then sent to Longman, with the following tragical result.

"I sent 'Count Julian' to your bookseller, Mr. Longman, and gave him to understand, though not in so many words, as people say, that you thought not unfavourably of it. I would have been glad to have given it up to him for half-a-dozen copies. . . . This would not do. I then proposed to print it at my own expense. This also failed. They would have nothing to do with it. We have lately had cold weather here, and fires. On receiving the last letter of Mr. Longman to this purport, I committed to the flames my tragedy of 'Ferranti and Giulio,' with which I intended to surprise you, and am resolved that never verse of mine hereafter shall be committed to anything else. My literary career has been a very curious one. You cannot imagine how I feel relieved at laying down its burden and abandoning this tissue of humiliations."

This is Landor all over. Because one tragedy is not to be printed, to rush to the fire with another is carrying despite to the farthest limit of hotheaded folly. Perhaps, however, after all, it was but the plan of "Ferranti and Giulio" which went into the fire, which would be the less damage.

In 1816 Landor went to Italy, from whence he sent forth the *Imaginary Conversations*, by which he will be chiefly known to posterity. These works have been greatly applauded by the best judges; but they have not penetrated the public mind. Perhaps, however worthy they had been, the effect on the general mass could never have been great; for how were the ignorant, who scarcely knew more than the names of the great personages introduced, to understand the fine points of character which were supposed to be unfolded in their imaginary talk? And works which are by their nature beyond the

comprehension of the general reader must be content with a limited appreciation. Scholarship, like everything else that is human, has its disadvantages. It is narrowing, like ignorance. It keeps the mind within a certain circle; teaches it to prefer conventional themes; and to rank perfection of expression higher than truth to nature. Landor's system and inspiration were opposed in every principle to those which Wordsworth had spent his life in expounding, and consequently to the new fountain of literary life which belonged to the age; but they have always found the audience he would himself have most desired, and will probably continue to do so. They range over a wide extent of history from the great Greeks and Romans, mediæval nobles, Italian poets, reformers, statesmen, courtiers, and great ladies of the picturesque ages, down to contemporaries of his own; and embrace almost as large a range of topics. For our own part, we find character deficient in these generally very able, and sometimes brilliant little scenes. In many of them, naturally enough, the man who is not of Landor's way of thinking has a very poor part in the discussion, being put up as a sort of foil to the eloquence of the other, who entertains the same faith as his creator; and in this way it is curious to see Melancthon, for example, that mild man of compromises, crushing Calvin in argument, with an ease which makes the victory scarcely worth having. In some cases the familiarity of the dialogue between historical personages takes the reader aback, and in almost all we are forced against our will to see the

ideas and tendencies of the nineteenth century painfully masquerading in robes of other days. But at the same time these curious historical studies have been approved and applauded by many of the most perfectly qualified critics; and Landor himself has been undoubtingly received to all the honours of the poetic craft by all the poets who were his contemporaries. He lived to be the *doyen* of his art, the old man eloquent, at whose feet every ardent youth was proud to sit. Not Southey alone, but all the fraternity, applauded his productions and sought his friendship. When his first volume of *Imaginary Conversations* appeared, Wordsworth added a postscript of thanks and approbation to Southey's letter. He had "the praise of his peers" in no limited degree: but he never penetrated to the general heart, consequently he will never be capable of the highest fame.

To give a catalogue of the miscellaneous works of Southey would be almost impossible. He produced perhaps a larger body of literature than any other man living, making his income by reviews and critical articles, by histories and biographies, few of which merit higher praise than that of being excellent and conscientious work done without prejudice or partiality. One of these at least, his *Life of Nelson*, has become a classic. His own purpose in its composition is explained in his preface. He found that a life of the great seaman was wanted, "clear and concise enough to become a manual for the young sailor, which he may carry about with him till he has treasured up the example in his memory and heart." The book admir-

ably carries out this intention. Its clear, direct, and brilliant narrative has something in it of the power of the minstrel as well as the skill of the historian ; and the complicated story of the age never confuses the simple, lambent vigour, the heroic unity of the principal figure. There is no superfluity in it, but a picturesque fulness of detail. The same can scarcely be said for the lives of Wesley and Cowper, though both are important and valuable works. They are perhaps too long drawn out, especially that of the unhappy poet, in which there is so little incident: yet both remain standard books, and no subsequent performance has superseded them. Southey planned other and greater historical works, and contemplated with some melancholy, yet not without a certain pleasure, the idea of being chiefly remembered by those productions; but he did not live to carry his larger conceptions out. The elaborate and elephantine humour of the *Doctor* gave himself a great deal of pleasure: but the world has no longer leisure for pleasantries, even when mingled with wisdom, so lengthened and so laborious.

He put nothing out of his hand—curiously enough except his poems, which were what he loved the best and devoted himself most enthusiastically to—which was not creditable and good. The minor poems, however, are many of them very little worthy of his reputation, and some, even of those which he himself thought well of, and which his friends praised, are of no advantage to it. William Taylor of Norwich, a name which intrudes itself continually into the litera-

ture of that time, refers in letter after letter to a certain "Old Woman of Berkeley," which Southey modestly allows to be a success; but we doubt whether any jury even of the gentlest readers would vote for its preservation. His weekly engagement to produce a set of verses for the *Morning Post* is no doubt the cause of the existence of many of these minor poems. They did very good service by furnishing a little income to the young and frugal pair at the commencement of their life; but it seems a pity to preserve, in a permanent form, so much verse that has so little merit in it.

Towards the end of Southey's life there happened to him what we can call nothing less than a great literary misfortune. He had been made Poet Laureate some time before, owing much to the good offices of Scott, to whom the appointment had been offered, and who resigned it, if we may so speak, in his favour. Southey tried to make a condition beforehand that the usual Odes and birthday salutations should not be required of him, but somehow this arrangement fell through, and he was called upon after all to supply, like his predecessors, the tedious tale of verse. When old King George died, it would seem that he thought some special effort was required of him. In the course of the years he had changed his politics entirely, and the young republican and revolutionary had turned into a thorough and sound Conservative and supporter of Church and King. Nobody will believe now that Southey had any interested motive in making this change. The wonder

is rather that he could ever have been anything but that which he ended by being. It was the natural atmosphere of his mind, the natural condition of his perfectly regulated and sober life. But in those days of excited politics any change of the kind was branded as an apostasy, and there were many who accused Southey of being a turncoat, a "rat," a deserter from the cause of the people by reason of his pension and the favour of the great. Some time before, his early production, the dramatic sketch called "Wat Tyler," which he had never published, and had considered entirely abolished and done away with, was brought out suddenly by some scoundrel into whose hands it had fallen, with the intention of covering him with confusion, and also shaming the Government which was supposed to have bought him. Southey accepted the consequences with courage, and added the boyish effort to the collection of his works with a manly acknowledgment that life had taught him various lessons between the ages of eighteen and forty, "and that it may not be supposed I think it any reproach to have written it, or that I am more ashamed of having been a republican than of having been a boy." But it cannot be supposed that this passage of arms had been pleasant to him, or the discussions of which it was the cause. How his good sense and judgment could have so far and entirely forsaken him, however, as to lead him to throw himself into the hands of his adversaries without shield or protection, as he did when he produced the poem with which he intended to do honour to poor old

George III., it is impossible to understand. To make the matter a little more fatal, he prefixed to the "Vision of Judgment" a preface, in which he attacked with the sternest vigour the "Satanic school" newly arisen in poetry, with reference too clear to be mistaken to Lord Byron. Thus he delivered himself over with an extraordinary blindness of self-assertion and solemn vanity into the very hands of his slayers. The retaliation of the poet whom he thus assailed was made only too easy. It will be more properly treated when we have reached the corresponding point in the story of Byron and the younger brethren of poetry. But the "Vision of Judgment" itself is one of Southey's misfortunes in every way. It was an attempt to gain a footing for the hexameter in English verse, and even in that was not successful; but when we have said that Southey avows his poem to have been suggested by the great work of Dante, and does not shrink or tremble before the inevitable comparison, we have given all the proof necessary of his extraordinary temerity and blindness. "The reader," he says, "will so surely think of the admirable passage in Dante, which was in the writer's mind when these lines were composed, that I should not think it necessary to notice the imitation were it not that we live in an age of plagiarism. . . . I have never contracted an obligation of this kind either to contemporary or predecessor without acknowledging it." Thus Southey does not hesitate on the threshold of his profane political paradise to call forth the great image of one of the Sovran poets

of the world, to put himself by Dante's side, and treat him with respectful brotherhood and no alarm as his "predecessor." The audacity takes away our breath.

In the unfortunate poem itself, from a pretty twilight picture of his mountains and the shining evening skies behind them, we are suddenly transported into a visionary world where the aged shadow of poor old George,—pathetic, helpless, wrong-headed, mad king,—rises to judgment, and all heaven and hell are roused to receive him. But hell can bring no accusers against him; neither is there a voice in heaven or earth to condemn him; and with a great retinue of former statesmen and courtiers advancing in state to meet him, he is led upward to the reserved seats appointed for kings in that polite and considerate heaven. The curious spectacle of the reverential spirit-courtier, evidently hat in hand, and with bowed head, giving to his king a highly satisfactory account of the future of England, would be amusing were we not too sorry to see Southey committing himself so terribly. No poem ever written is more entirely indefensible or threw all his stronghold more unguardedly open to the enemy. It was a terrible and inexplainable mistake, due to the absence of perception which had made him choose so many strange subjects, to the self-will which had always been in Southey's poetical work, and to a self-confidence which had grown with years.

We must conclude with something more agreeable than this unfortunate production. One of the

minor poems which increase the bulk of his works, without adding in any way to his fame, was a "Pilgrimage to Waterloo," which was the product of a holiday spent abroad. The following verses from the proem to this work, and which describe his return home, are among the most beautiful and touching he ever wrote :—

"O joyful hour, when to our longing home
The long-expected wheels at length drew nigh!
When the first sound went forth, 'They come, they come!'
And hope's impatience quicken'd every eye!
'Never had man whom Heaven would heap with bliss
More glad return, more happy hour than this.'

"Aloft on yonder bench, with arms dispread,
My boy stood, shouting there his father's name,
Waving his hat around his happy head;
And there, a younger group, his sisters came:
Smiling they stood with looks of pleased surprise,
While tears of joy were seen in elder eyes.

"Soon each and all came crowding round to share
The cordial greeting, the beloved sight;
What welcomings of hand and lip were there!
And when those overflowings of delight
Subsided to a sense of quiet bliss,
Life hath no purer deeper happiness.

. . . .

"But there stood one whose heart could entertain
And comprehend the fulness of the joy;
The father, teacher, playmate, was again
Come to his only and his studious boy:
And he beheld again that mother's eye
Which with such ceaseless care had watch'd his infancy."

Poor Southey! this boy, "waving his hat around his happy head" was the dearest object of his life. The poem was scarcely printed in which this fond description is given, when Herbert, the beloved, the only and studious boy, was taken away from him. He came to a blank and terrible pause in his life, such darkness of anguish as only parents know; and though he lived long after, and had another son given him as if to replace the lost, Southey never "got over" this crushing blow, or was the same man again. Printed among his later poems is a curious broken page, mingled of verses from the Bible and fragmentary lines of his own.

No more great attempts, only a few autumnal flowers, like second primroses—

"That name
In sacred silence buried, which was still,
At noon and eve, the never-wearying theme
Of dear discourse,"

——"playful thoughts
Turned now to gall and evil."

"They who look for me in our Father's Kingdom
Will look for *him* also: inseparably
Shall we be so remembered."

Such are the detached and broken lines, like sobs that gave utterance to his sorrow. An "In Memoriam" full of tender art and pains could not have been written by a father over the grave of his only son. These broken notes touch the reader's heart, if he has ever suffered in a similar way, with that pang of keen and almost intolerable fellow-feeling which is the profoundest form of sympathy. And thus we leave Southey, with our hearts bleeding for him—he whose

heart had been open to forsaken children, to the weak and the needy, all his life,—yet out of his arms his own was taken, inscrutable and terrible recompense of a good man's life.

It will be suitable to name here a young and hapless poet whose brief story can never be dissociated from Southey's name. Henry Kirke White, who died in the beginning of the century, October 1806, at the age of twenty-one, a poor youth so far in advance of his age that he died of examinations and over-cramming, by the kind but injudicious hands of the college authorities of St. John's, Cambridge, where he had gained a sizorship. He was one of those saintly youths whose religious blameless lives will always be reverentially read by the simple public, and whose gentle, devotional verses charm and awe and touch, perhaps, a larger number of minds than are ever affected by the highest voices of poetry. An early volume of poetry, which he published at seventeen, received the honours of a kind of martyrdom from a bitter critic; and the consumptive and suffering young poet almost died of the cruel assault. Southey, always kind, was moved by this to an indignant championship of the dying youth, consoled him with tender praise, and afterwards published his little biography and innocent pious "Remains," which became dear to many a young and innocent reader.

Other young names of promise never carried out, which the always generous and tender hand of the gentle Laureate did its best to crown, might be added:

perhaps that of Herbert Knowles is the only one which has lingered in any reader's memory. His "Verses in the Churchyard at Richmond" used to appear in those curious receptacles of little-known verse—school reading-books, and other collections. And Southey's name is still more closely connected with that of Caroline Bowles, whom he married in the end of his life—an event which, as so often happens, disturbs the perfection of his domestic story, without having resulted in any special personal advantage. She was the author of various stories, poems, and essays—the latter of which, in the form of a series of "Chapters on Churchyards," published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, are almost the only relics of her that have a faint survival.

ROBERT SOUTHEY, born 1774; died 1843.

Published Joan of Arc, 1795; second edition, 1798.
Letters from Spain and Portugal, 1797.
Thalaba, 1801.
Metrical Tales, 1804.
Madoc, 1805.
Letters from England by Don Manuel Espriella, 1807.
Curse of Kehama, 1810.
Roderic, the Last of the Goths, 1814.
Life of Nelson, 1813.
Life of Wesley.
Life of Cowper, 1837.
The Doctor, 1834.

He accepted the office of Poet-Laureate in 1813, and wrote the Vision of Judgment in 1821.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR, born 1775; died 1864.

Published Early Poems, in 1795.
Gebir, 1802.
Simonidia, etc., 1805.
Count Julian, 1812.
Idyllia Heroica (Latin), 1814.
Imaginary Conversations, 1824 to 1846.
Letters of a Conservative, 1836.
Satin on Satirists, 1837.
Dramas, 1839.
Last Fruit of an Old Tree, 1853.
Dry Sticks Fagoted, 1858.

HENRY KIRKE WHITE, born 1785; died 1806.

CAROLINE BOWLES (afterwards Southey), born 1787; died 1854.
Published Chapters on Churchyards, 1829.

END OF VOL. I.

Printed by R. & R. CLARK, *Edinburgh*.